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Emotional Intelligence as a Key Factor for the Success of Microentrepreneurs in Ecuador

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Abstract

This study analyzes the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on the productive performance of micro-entrepreneurs in Zone 5 of Ecuador, which includes the provinces of Guayas, Santa Elena, and Los Ríos. EI, defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own and others' emotions, is crucial for business success, especially in contexts with limited resources and high uncertainty. Since microenterprises represent over 80% of employment in Ecuador, EI is essential for overcoming challenges such as limited access to financing, informality, and deficiencies in management skills. Using a quantitative approach, 200 micro-entrepreneurs from the commercial, industrial, and service sectors were surveyed, employing validated instruments such as the Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Inventory and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test. The results showed that EI significantly influences productive performance ($r = 0.501$), with empathy and social skills being the most influential dimensions. Micro-entrepreneurs in the service sector achieved higher EI and performance scores, while no significant gender differences were found, although women excelled in customer satisfaction. The study suggests implementing EI workshops, creating support networks, and promoting self-assessment tools to strengthen business management and ensure the sustainability of microenterprises in the region.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Microenterprises, Business Performance, Entrepreneurial Competencies, Business Sustainability, Entrepreneurial Skills.

Introduction

In an increasingly dynamic and competitive business world, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical factor for organizational success, leaders with high emotional intelligence positively impact employee morale and generate a supportive (Yadav & Hung, 2025), inclusive, and productive work environment (Cahyono, 2024). In addition, high EI has a positive correlation with increased productivity in the work environment. Workers with higher EI are more skilled at managing stress and interpersonal challenges, resulting in increased task completion and cooperation (M & S, 2024). Fostering EI in organizations increases productivity and enhances work dynamics, transforming it into a valuable resource for raising performance indicators (M & S, 2024).

For microentrepreneurs, who operate in conditions of high uncertainty and with scarce resources, developing emotional skills such as empathy, self-awareness, and self-regulation can be the key

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to overcoming challenges and achieving sustainable productive performance (Luc, 2024; Antonopoulou, 2024).

In the case of Ecuador, a country characterized by a rapidly changing economy marked by cultural diversity and economic instability, adaptability and flexibility are essential qualities for entrepreneurial success (Bastidas et al., 2024). According to Pedraza, (2021) in developing countries such as Ecuador, microenterprises represent 90% of businesses and more than 50% worldwide.

Within this framework, emotional acuity emerges as an indispensable asset for microentrepreneurs, empowering them to not solely govern pressure and formulate sound judgments, but in addition to construct staunch bonds with patrons, providers, and allies (Silva, 2025; Stanislavsky et al., 2023). Ecuador's Zone 5, specifically the territories of Guayas, Santa Elena, and Los Rios, demonstrates this authenticity vividly. This dynamic region has long borne witness to both the struggles and triumphs of its people, who leverage strength, savvy and compassion to transform challenge into opportunity. Though impediments abound, each new dawn brings the prospect of progress through pioneering spirits determined to illuminate their own paths to prosperity via diligence, inventiveness and community.

This region offers a varied and difficult socioeconomic environment because of its diverse economy, which is heavily impacted by industries including trade, agriculture, and services. The capacity to control emotions and build solid social connections might be the difference between success and failure in this fiercely competitive industry, which microentrepreneurs must traverse. Few studies examine the precise effect of emotional intelligence on the productive performance of microenterprises in environments like Ecuador's Zone 5, despite mounting evidence of its significance in business.

By assessing the effect of emotional intelligence on the productive performance of microentrepreneurs in Zone 5 of Ecuador, this study aims to close this research gap. We examine how microentrepreneurs' emotional intelligence affects their capacity to run their companies, adjust to change, and create enduring social and business networks using a hybrid methodology that blends quantitative and qualitative approaches. Furthermore, the socioeconomic and cultural unique characteristics of the area are taken into account, enabling us to provide useful suggestions for enhancing the emotional intelligence of micro-entrepreneurs and, as a result, enhancing their output.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a quantitative methodology to examine the connection between microentrepreneurs' productive performance in Zone 5 of Ecuador and their emotional intelligence (EI). It was feasible to measure the variables of interest objectively and create statistical correlations between them thanks to the quantitative design (Miksza et al., 2023).

Population and Sample

The study's participants comprised 697 microbusiness owners in Ecuador's Zone 5, which encompasses the provinces of Guayas, Santa Elena, and Los Ríos. The economy of this region is broad, with a significant presence of industries including services, agriculture, and commerce. This makes it a perfect place to study how emotional intelligence affects microenterprises' ability to produce.

Stratified sampling was employed to guarantee sufficient population representativeness, taking into account the distribution of microentrepreneurs throughout the several economic sectors (business, industry, and services) and provinces. By using this method, the sample was guaranteed to represent the region's geographic and socioeconomic variety. 200 microentrepreneurs, or roughly 28.7% of the overall population, made up the final sample size. In order to ensure high precision in the results and sufficient generalization of the findings to the research population, this sample size was chosen with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error in mind. To make sure the sample size was statistically representative, the finite population sampling formula was also used.

All microentrepreneurs had an equal chance of being included in the sample because participants were chosen at random from each stratum (province and economic sector). This process ensured the study's external validity and reduced potential biases. To guarantee a balanced representation of the various sectors and provinces, the sample was allocated proportionately to the population in each stratum.

Data Collection and Statistical Analysis Plan

Data was gathered using a validated structured questionnaire intended to assess microentrepreneurs' emotional intelligence and productivity. The questionnaire contained items derived from well-known instruments as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) (Sergienko et al., 2023), the Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Inventory, and the Bar-On (McCrimmon et al., 2023). This tool evaluated productive performance metrics including efficiency, profitability, and customer satisfaction in addition to important aspects of emotional intelligence (EI) like self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills.

There was only one phase to the data collection process. The 200 microentrepreneurs that were chosen were given the questionnaires. To make sure the instrument was valid and clear, a pilot test with 20 participants was carried out prior to the application. Because the surveys were given out in person, the participants' privacy and confidentiality were ensured.

This study's statistical analysis was conducted in multiple phases to investigate the connection between microentrepreneurs' productive performance in Zone 5 of Ecuador and their emotional intelligence (EI). First, the database was examined to fix any mistakes, missing information, or inconsistencies as part of the data cleaning and preparation process. The variables were then coded, giving the category responses numerical values to make it easier for the statistical tools to process them.

To describe the sample and the study variables, we began with a descriptive analysis after the data was ready. Measures of central tendency and dispersion, such as mean and standard deviation, are computed for both productive performance and emotional intelligence in this analysis. A summary of the participants was also given by describing the sample distribution based on demographic (age, gender) and geographic (provincial) factors.

The instrument used to test emotional intelligence was then examined for dependability. In order to ascertain the internal consistency of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was computed (Rivera et al., 2024). This stage was crucial to guaranteeing the validity and reliability of the data gathered for further research.

A correlation analysis was then conducted to investigate the connection between productive performance and emotional intelligence. To ascertain whether there is a linear relationship

between the two variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed (Wang & Zhang, 2023). In order to visualize the link between the variables, scatter plots were created in addition to this study.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) technique was then used to do a group comparison analysis (Jones et al., 2023). Comparing the variations in emotional intelligence and productive performance among the various economic sectors (commercial, industrial, and services) was made feasible by this approach. Post hoc testing will be used to determine which groups are affected if significant differences are discovered.

A linear regression analysis was carried out to further explore the relationship between the variables. With performance as the dependent variable and emotional intelligence (EI) as the independent variable, this research enabled us to assess the relationship between EI and productive performance. To assess their impact on the primary relationship, the potential inclusion of additional factors, like gender or province, in a multiple regression model was also investigated.

Lastly, a subgroup analysis was performed to investigate whether the microentrepreneurs' gender or province of origin had an impact on their emotional intelligence and productive performance. We were able to pinpoint particular trends from this investigation that might be pertinent to upcoming governmental policies or initiatives.

Ethical Considerations

The study's adherence to ethical standards was ensured. An informed consent form outlining the study's goals, how the data will be used, and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity was signed by each participant. Additionally, before to beginning data collecting, permission was acquired from the relevant institution's ethics committee.

Results

The sample comprised 200 microbusiness owners from Guayas, Santa Elena, and Los Ríos provinces in Zone 5 of Ecuador. The majority of participants (55%), followed by the service sector (30%) and the industrial sector (15%), were from the business sector. The gender distribution of the microentrepreneurs was 40% female and 60% male. The average age of the participants was 42 years, with a standard deviation of 8.5 years.

In terms of emotional intelligence (EI), the microentrepreneurs showed an average score of 3.8 on a scale of 1 to 5, with a standard deviation of 0.6. The EI dimensions with the highest scores were empathy (4.1) and social skills (4.0), while self-regulation obtained the lowest score (3.5). Concerning productive performance, the indicator with the highest score was customer satisfaction (4.2), followed by efficiency (3.9) and profitability (3.7).

Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the emotional intelligence questionnaire was 0.876, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument. All items showed a positive correlation with the total score, confirming the validity of the questionnaire.

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and productive performance. The correlation coefficient was 0.501, indicating a moderate association between both variables. This relationship was stronger in the service sector ($r = 0.55$) compared to the commercial ($r = 0.48$) and industrial ($r = 0.42$) sectors.

Sector	Correlation coefficient (r)	Interpretation
General	0.501	Moderate
Services	0.55	Moderate to strong
Commercial	0.48	Moderate
Industrial	0.42	Moderate

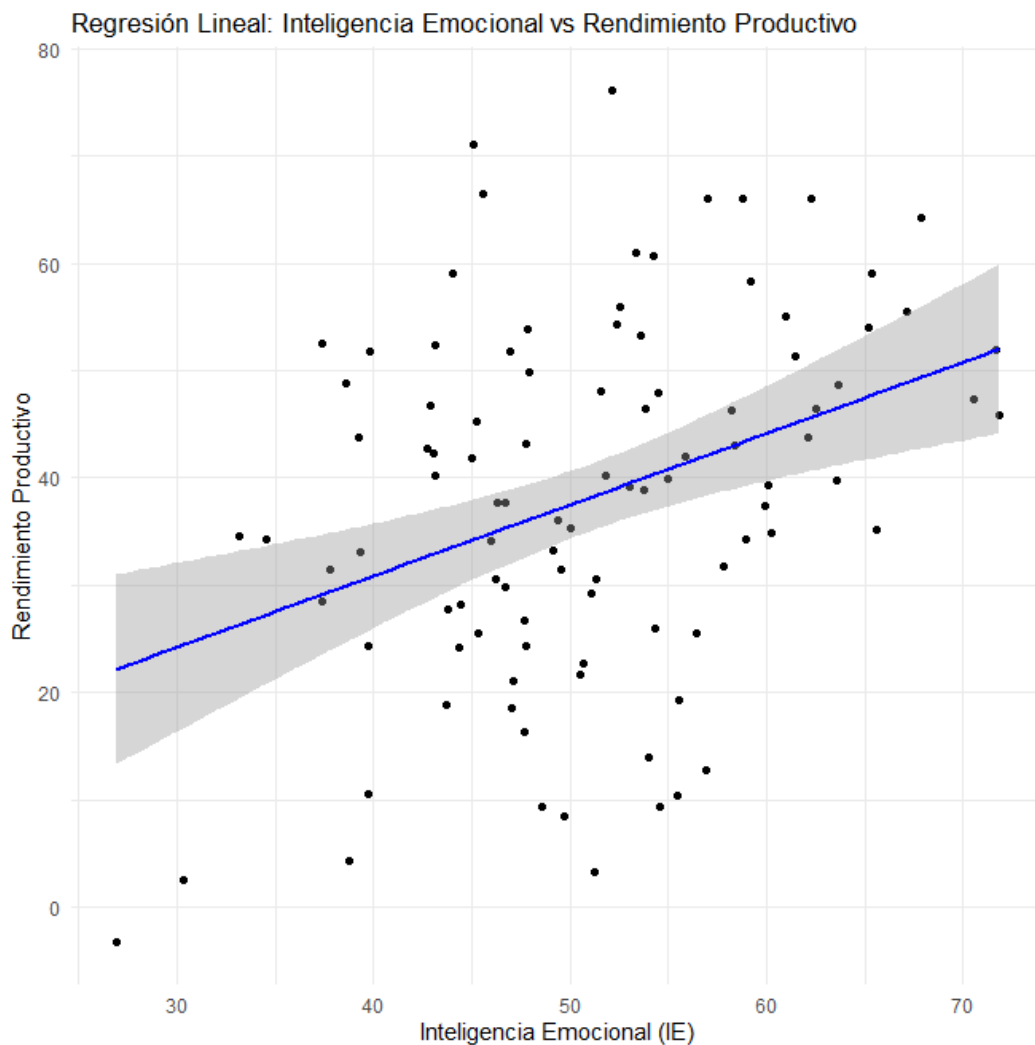
Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Emotional Intelligence and Productive Performance by Sector.

Comparison of Groups by Economic Sector

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed significant differences in the levels of emotional intelligence between economic sectors. Microentrepreneurs in the service sector obtained higher EI scores ($M = 4.0$) compared to those in the commercial ($M = 3.7$) and industrial ($M = 3.5$) sectors. These differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Post hoc (Tukey) tests confirmed that the differences were mainly between the service sector and the other two sectors.

Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Productive Performance

Linear regression analysis indicated that emotional intelligence explains approximately 25% of the variance in productive performance ($R^2 = 0.32$). This result suggests that EI has a moderate but significant impact on the performance of microentrepreneurs. In addition, it was observed that the empathy dimension contributed the most to this impact, followed by social skills.



Subgroup Analysis

In the analysis by gender, no significant differences were found in the levels of emotional intelligence between men and women. However, women showed slightly higher productive performance on the customer satisfaction indicator (mean = 4.3) compared to men (mean = 4.1). In terms of province, microentrepreneurs in Guayas scored higher in productive performance (mean = 3.9) compared to those in Santa Elena (mean = 3.6) and Los Ríos (mean = 3.5).

Discussion

The study's findings show that productive performance in Ecuador's Zone 5 microentrepreneurial sector is significantly impacted by emotional intelligence (EI). These findings align with the pertinent scientific literature, which has shown the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on entrepreneurial performance by a number of researchers (Ingram et al., 2019; Fernandez-Ronquillo et al., 2018; Deb et al., 2023).

In particular, the study by Ingram et al. (2019) highlights that intrapersonal competences have an indirect impact on interpersonal processes, but interpersonal abilities of the EI have a direct impact on business performance. This is in line with our results, which show that the EI characteristics that had the most effects on productive performance were empathy and social competence. Similarly, the higher EI and performance ratings seen in the service industry lend credence to the idea that emotional control is a critical component in situations where successful business operations depend on interpersonal contact. Furthermore, Fernandez-Ronquillo et al. (2018) found that developing entrepreneurial abilities and emotional intelligence are crucial components for raising microentrepreneurs' output in Ecuador's Zone 5. These conclusions are supported by this investigation, which shows that skills like empathy, self-control, and adaptability are essential for businesses to remain viable. Furthermore, this study provides direct empirical evidence gathered from the microentrepreneurs themselves, further supporting the significance of EI in this situation, even if Fernandez-Ronquillo et al. (2018)'s research was based on the Delphi technique with professionals.

Additionally, it was demonstrated by Deb et al. (2023) that emotional intelligence creates the link between small business performance and job happiness. In particular, our findings lend credence to the idea that skills like empathy, self-control, and flexibility are essential to a company's long-term viability. Even though Deb et al. (2023) used a PLS-SEM model to support their claims, this analysis offers more proof from another viewpoint, showing that the relationship between EI and economic performance holds true in a variety of contexts. Therefore, improving microentrepreneurs' emotional intelligence may show to be a crucial strategy to boost productivity and company sustainability in Ecuador and other developing economies.

Empathy was one of the Emotional Intelligence (EI) qualities that had the biggest effect on performance. This result is in line with recent research showing that building solid and enduring connections in the workplace requires the capacity to comprehend and meet the needs of both clients and staff (Sargsyan & Karapetyan, 2024; Hanaysha et al., 2022). Empathy can be a unique quality that fosters client happiness and loyalty in the microenterprise setting, where interpersonal connections and trust are essential.

In contrast, the economic sector's study revealed that, when compared to the commercial and industrial sectors, microentrepreneurs in the service sector had greater emotional intelligence and productive efficiency indices. Employees in the service industry with high emotional intelligence are able to control their emotions, which promotes better communication and a flexible workplace, claims Srivastava (2022). In the service industry, this competency is becoming more and more important for organizational performance (Pooja & Kumar, 2022). The service industry places a strong emphasis on the relationship between the customer and the business, particularly in regions like South India, where employees' emotional intelligence is essential to reaching corporate objectives (Srivastava, 2022).

There were no discernible differences in the emotional intelligence levels of males and girls in the subgroup research. The specific context of microentrepreneurs in Ecuador, where both sexes face similar challenges and develop emotional skills similarly, may be the reason for this finding, which deviates from some research suggesting that women tend to possess higher emotional competencies (Faisal & Netrawati, 2023; Rind et al., 2023). Nonetheless, women performed somewhat better on the customer satisfaction measure, which may be related to their increased capacity for relationship management and organizational success (McConnell, 2018).

When it came to provincial differences, Guayas microentrepreneurs outperformed those in Santa Elena and Los Ríos in terms of their productive performance. The socioeconomic peculiarities of Guayas, a province with greater economic development and resource accessibility than the other two, may be the cause of this. This is in line with study by Ruiz et al. (2017), which shows that businesses in more developed regions typically perform more productively than those in less developed regions. This research emphasizes how important it is to consider the local context when creating policies and initiatives to assist microbusiness owners (Potter & Smith, 2024).

Practical Implications

The study's findings have significant ramifications for the creation of regulations and educational initiatives targeted at microbusiness owners. First, it is advised to undertake training on emotional intelligence that cover important aspects including empathy, self-control, and social skills.

Furthermore, it is critical to facilitate the development of support networks among Zone 5 microentrepreneurs so that they can exchange best practices, tactics, and experiences pertaining to emotional intelligence. These networks would foster cooperation and reciprocal learning in addition to enhancing the individuals' emotional intelligence.

Lastly, it is recommended that self-assessment methods be used so that microentrepreneurs can track their emotional growth and establish goals for ongoing development. Periodic assessments could be used in conjunction with these tools to gauge the effectiveness of interventions and make necessary strategy adjustments.

Limitations and Future Research

It's critical to acknowledge this study's limitations even if it offers insightful information regarding the connection between emotional intelligence and productive performance. First, we are unable to determine causal correlations between variables due to the study's cross-sectional methodology. A longitudinal method could be used in future studies to investigate the long-term effects of emotional intelligence development on performance.

Furthermore, because the sample was restricted to Ecuador's Zone 5, the findings might not apply to other parts of the nation or to situations outside. Future research should broaden the geographic reach in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Conclusions

In summary, this study shows that microentrepreneurs in Zone 5 of Ecuador function more productively when they possess emotional intelligence. In addition to enhancing company management, emotional intelligence—particularly empathy and social skills—also helps to fortify bonds with suppliers, customers, and partners. These results demonstrate the necessity of integrating emotional intelligence into business development and training plans in order to support the expansion and sustainability of microbusinesses in Ecuador.

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