



**BEYOND THE
WORDS CAMPAIGN**

BEYOND THE WORDS CAMPAIGN REPORT

**Part 1: Emotional Intelligence Education
– Findings from Community Interviews**

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Prepared by: The Centre for Emotional Intelligence SA (CFEI)



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Centre for Emotional Intelligence (CFEI) extends its sincere appreciation and gratitude to all individuals and partners who contributed to the success of the Beyond the Words Campaign (BWC) 2025. The campaign would not have been possible without the collective commitment, expertise, and generosity of time demonstrated by those involved.

Special recognition is extended to Ms Cindy Fourie, Ms Mlilo Mpondo, Ms Zimi Mabunzi, Ms Nothando Mudzingwa, Ms Noluvuyo Bacela, Ms Nonhlanhla Masemola and Mr Nkanyiso Radebe, who served as the independent interview panellists. This panel played a critical role in the formation of the BWC 2025 Campaign Team. Collectively, the panellists reviewed 68 curriculum vitae, participated in multiple interview sessions, and applied rigorous and impartial assessment processes to ensure the selection of individuals best suited to support the campaign. Their dedication to transparency, fairness, and quality assurance contributed significantly to the campaign's success.

CFEI further acknowledges the *BWC 2025 Campaign Team*, comprising Mr Mduduzi Mbiza, Ms Ntombifuthi Mahlangu, Ms Thandeka Tembe, Ms Natola Msidi, and the organisation's Programme Development Manager, Mr Anele Zondi. The team demonstrated exceptional commitment to the campaign's objectives and embodied the values of emotional intelligence (EQ) throughout the process. Their collective efforts, ranging from participant engagement and data collection to reflective facilitation, ensured the successful execution of the campaign. Each member brought valuable personal insight, professional competence, and ethical responsibility that strengthened both the process and the quality of the findings.

Finally, and most importantly, CFEI extends its deepest gratitude to the 50 participants who generously volunteered their time and shared their personal reflections and experiences during the one-on-one interviews. Their willingness to engage openly, honestly, and without any form of compensation made this campaign possible. Their contributions provided rich qualitative insights and meaningful perspectives that form the foundation of this report and will inform future EQ education, advocacy, and community engagement initiatives.



To all who participated in and supported the Beyond the Words Campaign 2025, your contributions have advanced an important national conversation on EQ, active listening, and human connection. CFEI is sincerely grateful for your partnership and commitment to building emotionally aware and resilient communities.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

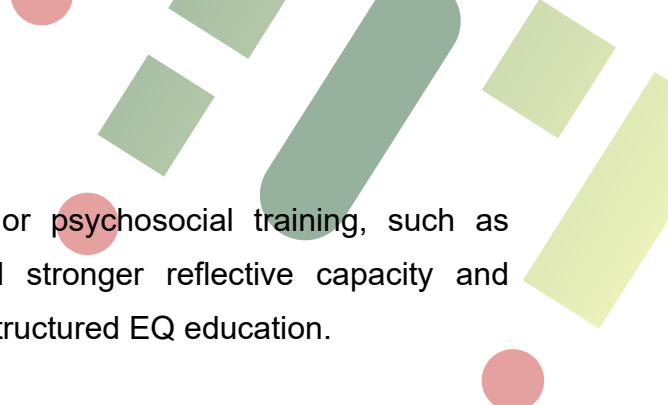
The Beyond the Words Campaign (BWC) 2025, implemented by the Centre for Emotional Intelligence (CFEI) South Africa, was a community-based advocacy initiative aimed at raising awareness of emotional intelligence (EQ) and strengthening active listening, emotional awareness, and emotional interpretation skills. The campaign responds to a growing need for practical EQ education in environments where emotional misinterpretation, avoidance, and poor communication contribute to conflict and disconnection.

Through 50 in-depth, semi-structured one-on-one interviews conducted between April and July 2025, the campaign gathered qualitative insights into how individuals perceive, interpret, and manage emotions across personal, professional, and social contexts. Participants represented diverse age groups, sectors, and geographic locations, with the majority engaging primarily in workplace and online environments.

The findings reveal a consistent gap between emotional experience and emotional competence. While participants reported frequent exposure to emotional interactions, particularly in the workplace, many indicated that these environments discourage emotional expression. Emotions are often suppressed to maintain professionalism or avoid conflict, limiting opportunities for healthy emotional engagement and resolution.

Although participants rated themselves moderately to highly across key components of EQ, qualitative responses suggested limited emotional literacy. Many struggled to identify, name, or articulate emotions beyond basic primary emotions such as anger, happiness, and sadness. This gap was especially evident in responses related to self-regulation and emotional awareness.

Empathy emerged as the strongest self-rated competency; however, participants commonly reported avoiding emotional conversations, withdrawing when emotionally overwhelmed, or managing distress through avoidance rather than communication. This indicates that empathy, while present, is not consistently translated into constructive emotional action.



Participants with formal exposure to emotional or psychosocial training, such as psychologists and social workers, demonstrated stronger reflective capacity and emotional vocabulary, underscoring the impact of structured EQ education.

The campaign highlights a critical need for accessible, practical, and context-specific EQ education. There is a strong willingness among participants to develop their EQ, but a limited understanding of how to do so without structured guidance. These findings support the case for sustained EQ interventions in workplaces, educational settings, and community programmes.

The Beyond the Words Campaign suggests that EQ is not an intuitive skill but a learnable competency that requires intentional education and practice. Investment in EQ education offers significant potential to improve communication, reduce conflict, and strengthen social cohesion. CFEI's work positions EQ as a foundational capability for healthier relationships, more effective workplaces, and resilient communities.

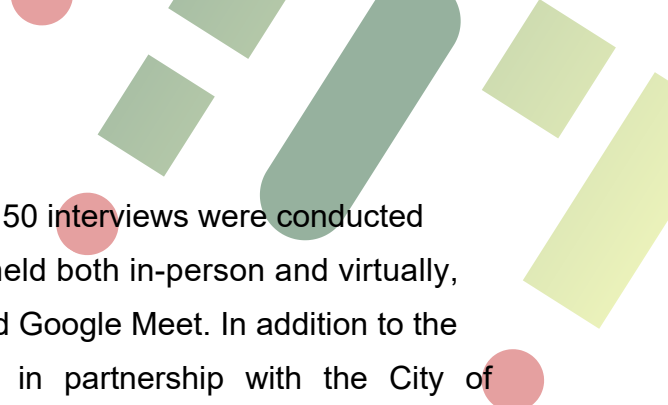
2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background on the Beyond the Words Campaign

On 1 April 2025, the Centre for Emotional Intelligence (CFEI) South Africa launched the ***Beyond the Words Campaign*** (BWC) 2025. The campaign was centred around five core objectives, primarily focused on raising awareness of the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ) in daily interactions.

The ***Beyond the Words Campaign*** is an initiative of CFEI aimed at advocating for and promoting EQ education. Established in 2025 as an annual campaign, BWC seeks to explore creative and accessible ways of increasing public understanding of EQ and its practical application in everyday life.

The 2025 campaign ran from April to July 2025 and was implemented by a team of five campaign members. During this period, the team conducted 50 one-on-one “coffee conversations” as well as an EQ education workshop.



To achieve the objectives of the campaign, a total of 50 interviews were conducted with voluntary participants. These interviews were held both in-person and virtually, using platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. In addition to the interview component, a workshop was delivered in partnership with the City of Tshwane and Tateni Community Care Service, with support from City Lodge Hotels and the Centre for Public Service Innovation.

This report focuses specifically on the outcomes and findings of the one-on-one interviews. The workshop component and its outcomes are documented in a separate report dedicated exclusively to the workshop.

2.2. Purpose of the Campaign

In today's fast-paced world, studies indicate that the average person retains only approximately 25% of what they hear during a conversation¹. This lack of deep listening often results in misunderstandings, conflict, and emotional disconnection.

The **Beyond the Words Campaign** (BWC) 2025 therefore, placed a strong emphasis on the importance of active listening, listening with empathy and emotional awareness. The campaign encouraged participants to reflect on moments where misunderstandings occurred, the emotions expressed by others in those interactions, and how they managed their own emotional responses at the time.

2.3. Campaign Objectives

The Beyond the Words Campaign (BWC) 2025 aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- Enhance emotional awareness by supporting participants to recognise and interpret emotions that exist beyond spoken words.
- Improve active listening and emotional interpretation skills in order to strengthen interpersonal communication.
- Encourage self-reflection on the ways in which emotions influence personal, professional, and social relationships.
- Raise awareness of the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ) in everyday interactions.

- Collect qualitative data on how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to emotions across different contexts.

2.4. Scope and Limitations

The ***Beyond the Words Campaign*** (BWC) 2025 was limited in scope to a total of 50 participants who took part in the one-on-one interviews, and 25 participants who attended the emotional intelligence (EQ) education workshop. The details, methodology, and outcomes of the workshop are documented in a separate workshop report and are therefore not covered in this report.

The interview participants comprised a combination of friends, family members, and acquaintances of the campaign team, as well as individuals who registered their interest through advertisements shared on the organisation's social media platforms. In addition, a significant number of participants were drawn from CFEI's existing database of individuals who had previously signed up to participate in campaign-related activities.

A participant selection criterion was developed to determine eligibility for the interviews. This criterion, included as Annexure B, outlines the minimum age requirements, geographic considerations, relevant knowledge or lived experience, and the mental capacity required for participation. It also details the process followed in selecting suitable candidates for the interviews.

The 50 interviews were conducted either in-person or virtually via platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet. In-person interviews were limited to participants who resided in, or were willing to meet within, the areas of Hatfield, Queenswood, Brooklyn, Arcadia, or Loftus (Pretoria). All other participants were interviewed virtually. In some instances, internet connectivity challenges affected the quality of audio recordings during online interviews.

All interviews were conducted by members of the campaign team. Interviews conducted online were recorded using the respective platform's built-in recording features, while in-person interviews were recorded using a two-way voice recorder.



The audio recordings were subsequently transcribed using the AI-based transcription application, **Otter Meeting Agent**.

3. CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

The **Beyond the Words Campaign** (BWC) 2025 raised awareness of, and advocated for, emotional intelligence (EQ) education through a series of one-on-one interviews conducted both virtually and in-person. In addition, the campaign included a leadership-focused EQ workshop for high school learners. The methodology and outcomes of the workshop are documented in a separate report and are therefore not detailed here.

The interview component of the campaign constituted a qualitative study aimed at understanding, in participants' own words, how emotions are perceived, interpreted, and managed in everyday life. The interviews explored emotional experiences across home, workplace, and community contexts.

A semi-structured interview approach was employed to allow participants the flexibility to share real-life experiences while ensuring consistency across interviews. This method enabled the collection of rich, contextual data and supported deeper reflection on emotional awareness, emotional expression, and emotional regulation in daily interactions.

3.1. Data Collection Methods

All participants were invited to take part in the campaign by completing a Google Form, which included a consent section confirming their willingness to participate in the interview and to be voice-recorded. Participants who were unable to complete the Google Form were required to provide verbal consent prior to the commencement of the interview.

Each participant was interviewed using a structured Interview Questionnaire consisting of 16 questions, as outlined in Annexure D. The questionnaire was divided into four sections:

- 
- **Section A:** Demographic Profile
 - **Section B:** Self-Reflection on Emotional Intelligence
 - **Section C:** Scenario-Based Reflection
 - **Section D:** Reflection and Growth

Sections B, C, and D comprised a combination of self-rated questions, scenario-based questions, and open-ended reflective questions. These questions required participants to reflect on their own emotional intelligence (EQ), including their level of self-awareness, ability to regulate emotions, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

The interviews were conducted by members of the campaign team. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes on average. In-person interviews tended to be longer, allowing for more in-depth discussion, pauses, and deviations as participants reflected more deeply on their experiences.

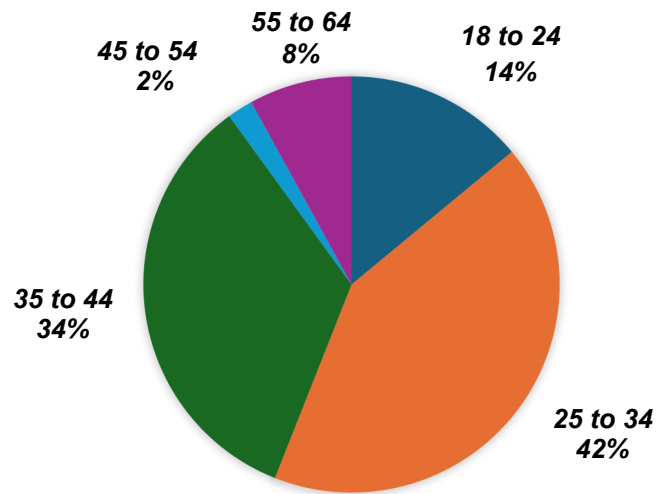
To assess participants' understanding of EQ, respondents were asked to rate themselves across the various components of EQ and to respond to open-ended, reflective questions aligned with the five core components of EQ: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

3.2. Sampling Approach and Demographics

The participant selection criteria permitted individuals aged 18 years and older who either resided in, or were able to travel to, Hatfield, Queenswood, Brooklyn, Arcadia, or Loftus (Pretoria) to participate in in-person interviews. Participants who did not meet these geographic requirements, but had access to the internet and virtual meeting platforms, were eligible to participate in online interviews.

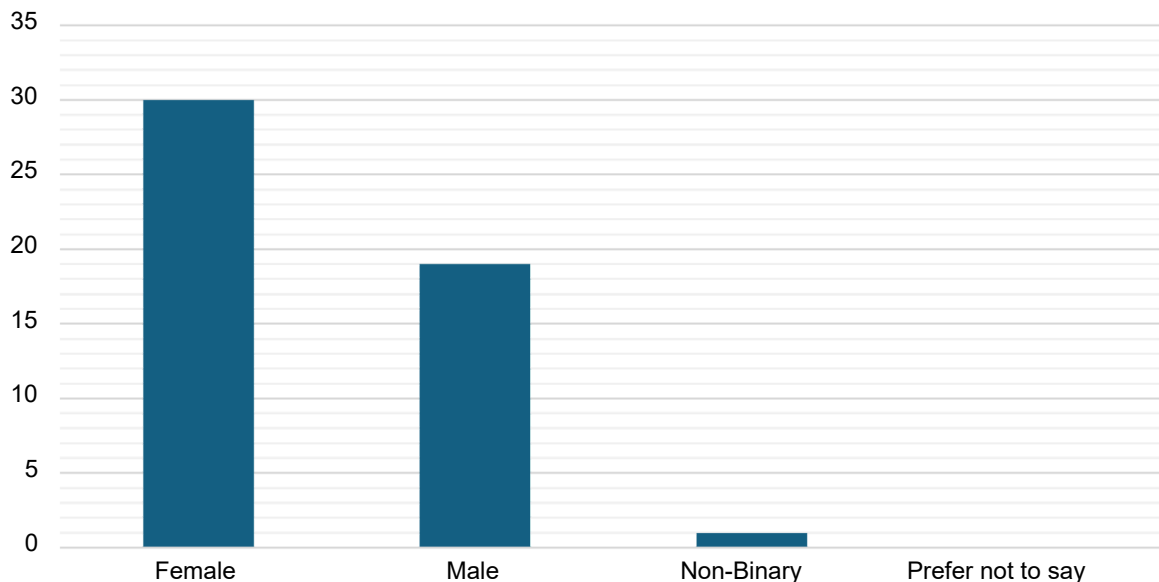
Of the 50 participants interviewed, seven interviews were conducted in-person, while 43 interviews were conducted virtually using platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet.

AGE GROUP



Of the 50 participants interviewed, the majority fell within the 25 to 34 age group, which accounted for 42% of the sample. This was followed by participants aged 35 to 44, who comprised 34% of the sample. Participants aged 18 to 24 represented 14%, while those aged 55 to 64 accounted for 8%. The smallest proportion of participants fell within the 45 to 54 age group, comprising 2% of the total sample.

GENDER

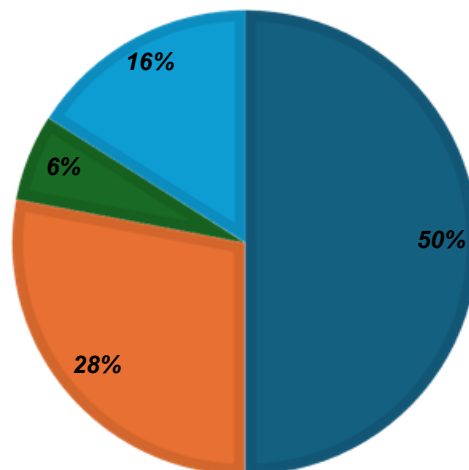


All 50 participants were asked to indicate how they identify in terms of gender and were given the option to withhold this information. All participants chose to disclose

their gender. Of the 50 participants, 30 identified as female, 19 identified as male, and 1 identified as non-binary.

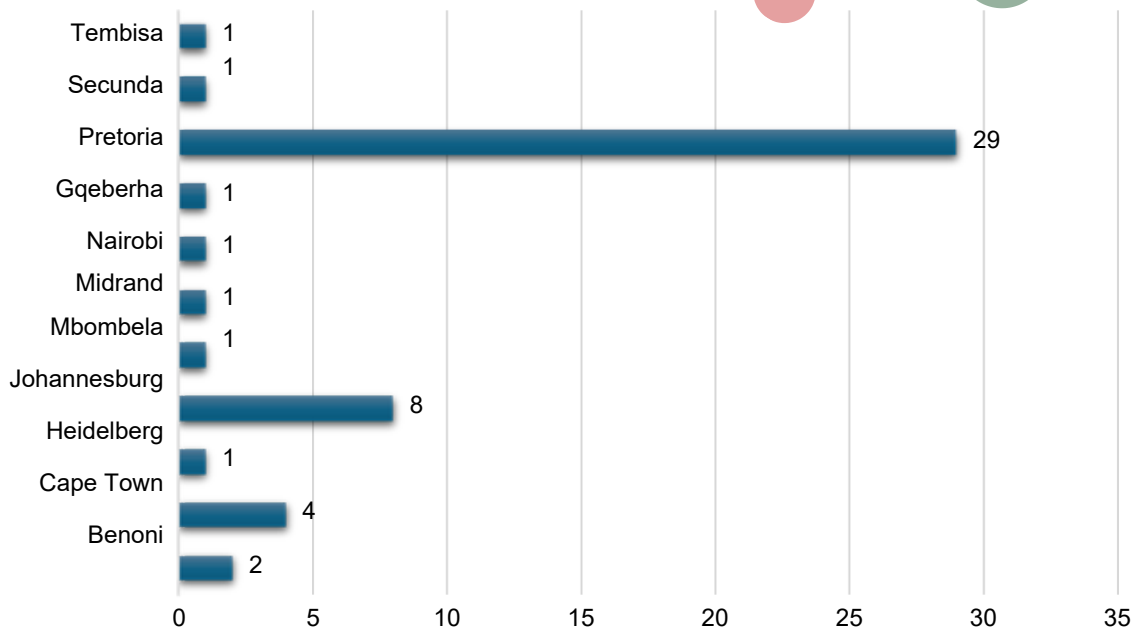
EMPLOYMENT

■ Private Sector ■ Public Sector ■ Student ■ Unemployed



Half of the participants were employed in the private sector, representing a range of industries including finance, manufacturing, retail, agriculture, information technology, non-governmental organisations, and psychology-related fields. This was followed by 28% of participants who were employed in the public sector, primarily within local government. A further 16% of participants were students, while the remaining 6% comprised unemployed youth who were not engaged in formal education.

LOCATION



Of the 50 participants interviewed, 29 were from various suburbs and townships within Pretoria. This was followed by eight participants from Johannesburg, four from Cape Town, and two from Benoni. Tembisa, Secunda, Midrand, Mbombela, and Heidelberg were each represented by one participant. These figures account for 49 participants in total. The remaining participant was based in Nairobi, Kenya.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

As an additional safeguard, the participant consent form (Annexure C) was read aloud to each participant at the commencement of every interview. This formed part of ethical best practice and ensured compliance with the organisation's ***Ethical Guidelines Policy***.

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were asked to provide consent to be interviewed, voice recorded, and to have their anonymised responses included in a report intended for public dissemination. Participants were further advised that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time or to decline to answer any questions they did not wish to respond to.

All interviews were conducted in accordance with the organisation's **Ethical Guidelines**

Policy. Interviewers received prior training on the policy and were required to review and adhere to its provisions before the commencement of the campaign. No personally identifiable information is included in this report.

4. CAMPAIGN OUTCOMES

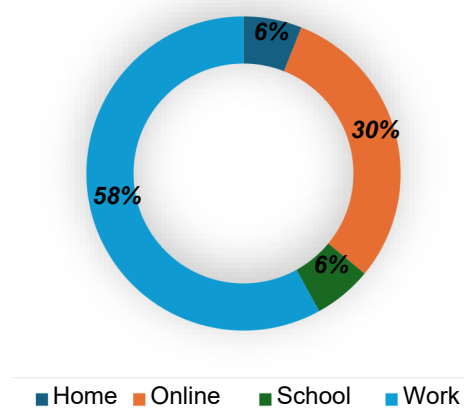
4.1. Key Findings

The final question in the demographic section asked participants to identify the settings in which they most frequently interact with others. This was further explored by asking where they spend the majority of their time being themselves and engaging socially.

Across responses, four primary settings emerged as the most common spaces for interpersonal interaction: the home environment, online platforms (particularly social media), educational institutions, and the workplace. These findings highlight that participants' emotional interactions largely occur across both personal and professional spaces, as well as within increasingly digital environments.

4.1.1. Environment

In what setting do you most frequently interact with others?

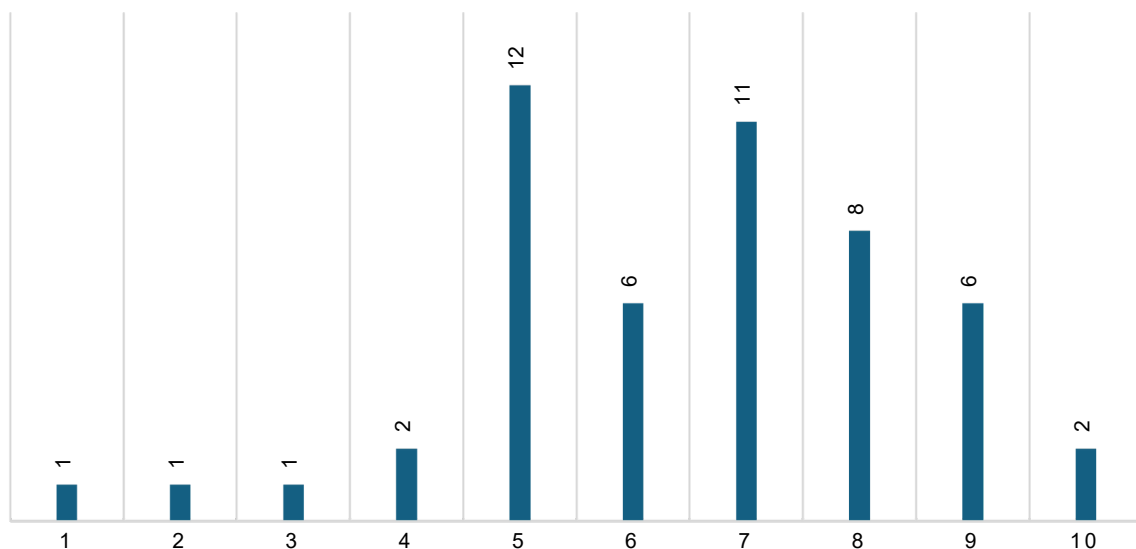


Most participants identified more than one environment in which they regularly interact with others. However, when asked to select the single setting where they interact most frequently, 58% indicated the workplace, followed by 30% who selected online platforms. A smaller proportion reported interacting most often at home (3%) and at school (3%).

Participants were subsequently asked whether they felt their emotional awareness had developed over time. The majority indicated that it had, noting increased reflection and understanding of their emotional responses. However, many also expressed that they were “not there yet”, acknowledging that emotional self-awareness is an ongoing process and that there remains significant room for growth.

4.1.3. Self-Regulation

SELF-RATED SELF-REGULATION LEVELS (N =50)



With regard to self-regulation, participants were asked to rate their ability to manage their emotions in difficult or challenging situations on a scale of 1 to 10.

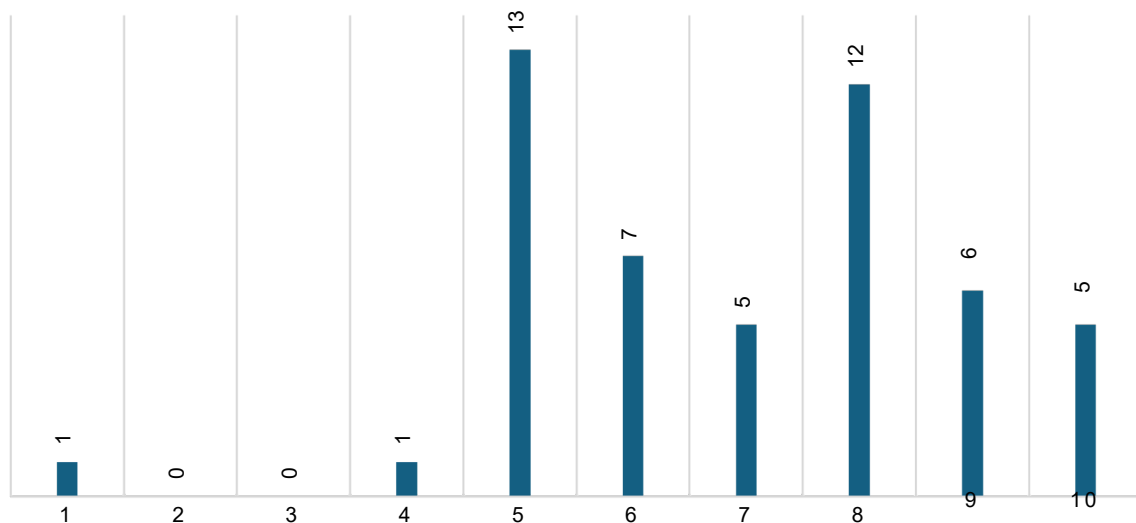
The majority of participants rated themselves in the mid-range. Twelve participants rated their self-regulation at level 5, followed by eleven participants who rated themselves at level 7. Only two participants rated themselves at level 10, indicating a high level of confidence in their ability to regulate emotions effectively.

To further explore self-regulation in practice, participants were presented with a scenario-based question in which they were asked to reflect on how they would feel and respond if they were one of the characters in the scenario. While most participants acknowledged that they would experience negative emotions such as hurt or frustration, their proposed coping strategies revealed challenges in emotional regulation.

Following this question, participants were asked to complete a series of self-rated assessments. These required participants to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represented poor competence and 10 represented excellent competence in the specified areas of emotional intelligence (EQ).

4.1.2. Self-Awareness

SELF-RATED SELF-AWARENESS LEVELS (N = 50)



Participants were asked to rate their level of self-awareness, defined as the ability to understand one's own emotions, strengths, and limitations, on a scale of 1 to 10.

The results showed that 13 participants rated themselves at level 5, 12 at level 8, 7 at level 6, 6 at level 9, 5 at level 7, and 5 at level 10. The remaining two participants rated themselves at 1 and 4, respectively. Overall, the majority of participants rated their self-awareness between 5 and 9, suggesting a moderate to high perceived level of self-awareness among the sample.

Participants' perceived self-awareness was further explored through open-ended questions. When asked, ***“What is the most challenging emotion for you to manage?”***,

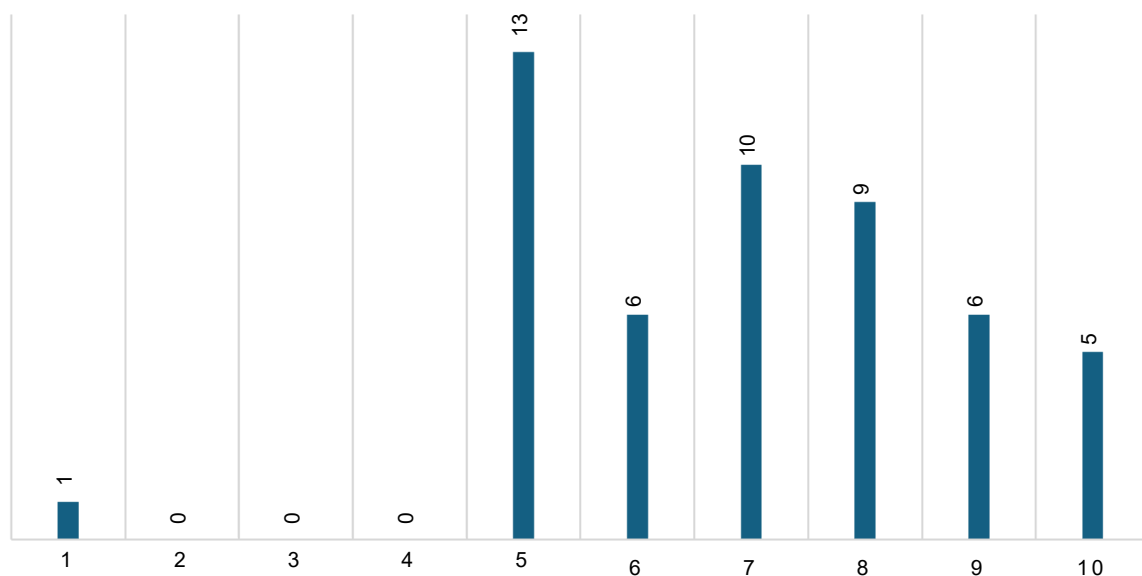
most participants identified negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and stress. Many reported that these emotions often resulted in lashing out at others, withdrawing socially, or feeling the need to isolate themselves.

A significant number of participants indicated that their response would involve avoiding the situation altogether or choosing not to communicate their feelings to the other character involved. This tendency to withdraw or suppress emotional expression suggests that, despite awareness of emotional responses, many participants struggle to regulate emotions in a constructive and communicative manner.

These findings highlight a gap between emotional awareness and effective emotional regulation, particularly in interpersonal contexts that require open communication and emotional expression.

4.1.4. Motivation

SELF-RATED MOTIVATION LEVELS (N = 50)



Participants were asked to rate their level of motivation, defined as the ability to remain driven and goal-oriented beyond external rewards. The majority of participants rated themselves at a moderate level, with most assigning themselves a score of 5. This was followed by ten participants who rated themselves at level 7, while five participants rated themselves at level 10, indicating a strong sense of intrinsic motivation.

To further assess participants' understanding of emotional intelligence (EQ) and their openness to personal development, they were asked the question: "Are there areas of EQ you would like to improve?" This question aimed to explore both awareness of EQ components and willingness to develop emotional competencies.

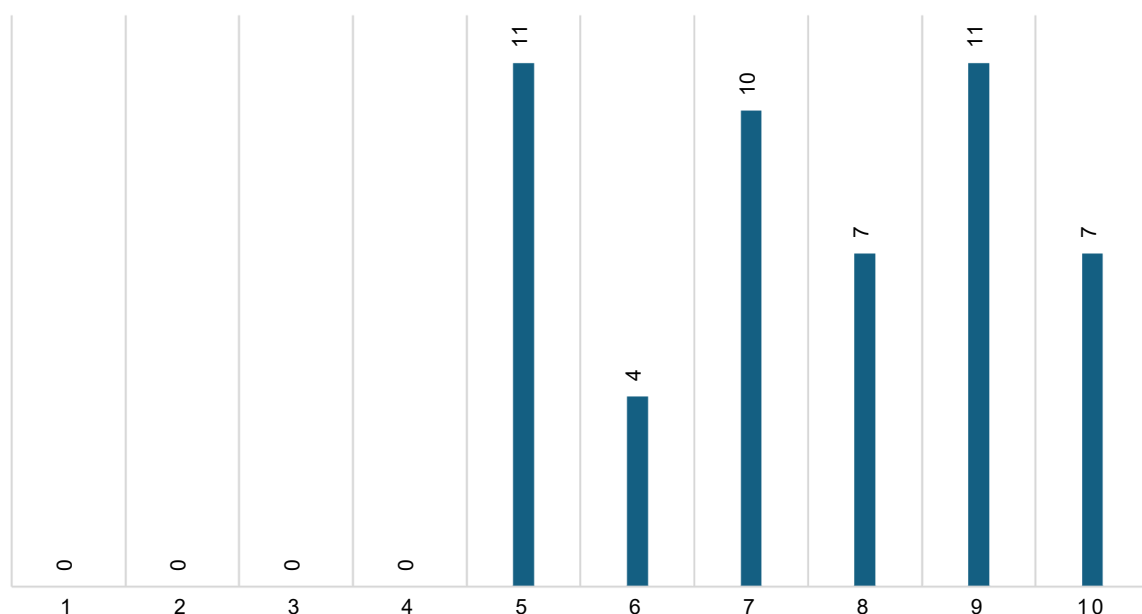
All participants expressed a willingness to improve their EQ, indicating a positive attitude towards personal growth and development. However, despite this openness, a significant number of participants were unable to clearly identify or name specific components of EQ they wished to develop.

Many participants described their developmental goals in broad or general terms, such as wanting to “be more emotionally intelligent” or “understand emotions better,” rather than explicitly identifying areas such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, or social skills. While participants were often able to describe behaviours or outcomes they wished to improve, they struggled to link these aspirations to specific EQ competencies.

These findings suggest that although participants recognise the importance of EQ and are motivated to develop it, there is a limited conceptual understanding of the distinct components of EQ. This highlights the need for more targeted EQ education that not only promotes self-improvement but also equips individuals with the language and frameworks necessary to understand and intentionally develop specific EQ skills.

4.1.5. Empathy

SELF-RATED EMPATHY LEVELS (N = 50)



Participants were asked to rate their level of empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the emotions of others. Overall, participants rated themselves



relatively high in this area. Seven participants rated themselves at level 10, while eleven participants rated themselves at level 9. Notably, all participants rated themselves 5 or above, suggesting a generally positive self-perception of empathic ability.

To explore this further, participants were asked whether there are emotions they find easier or harder to recognise in others. The majority of participants referenced primary emotions, such as anger and happiness, describing them as both easy and, at times, difficult to identify depending on the context. A small number of participants expressed the view that people often conceal or misrepresent their emotions, which they felt made emotional interpretation more challenging.

Participants were then asked to reflect on a recent situation in which someone expressed an emotion, to identify the emotion involved, and to explain the cues that helped them recognise it. Most participants again identified primary emotions, particularly anger, sadness, and happiness. A smaller group demonstrated a deeper level of emotional awareness by identifying secondary emotions, including frustration, disappointment, loneliness, and anxiety.

When describing how they identified these emotions, most participants referred to facial expressions, tone of voice, and behavioural cues, such as withdrawal or changes in engagement. Several participants noted that it was significantly easier to recognise emotions in individuals they knew well or were familiar with, compared to strangers or casual acquaintances.

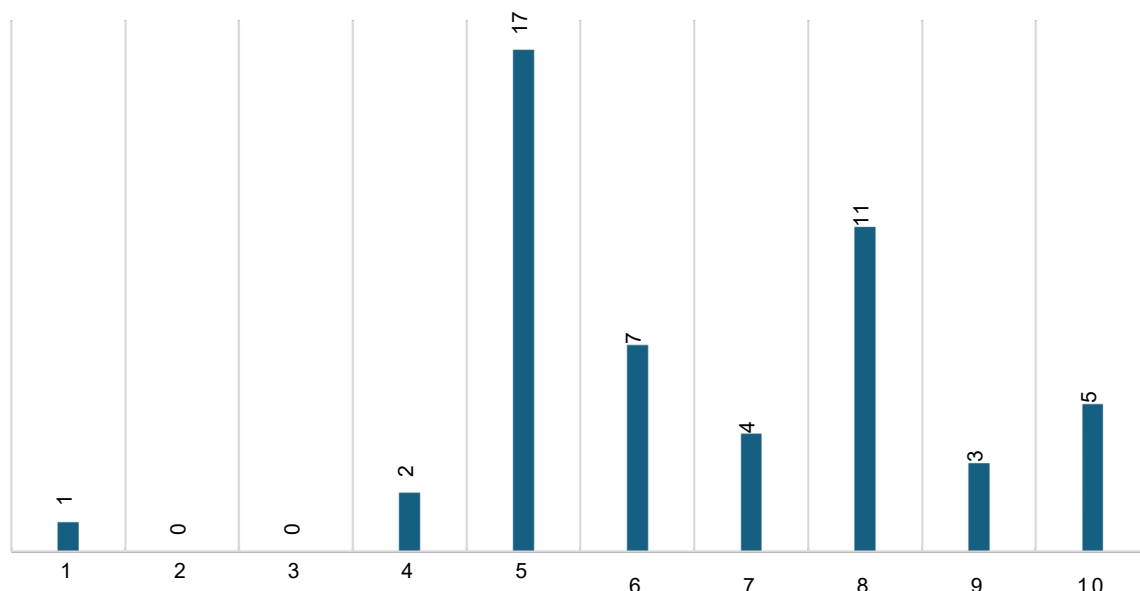
One participant highlighted difficulty in recognising neutral or ambiguous emotional states, explaining uncertainty about how to interpret or respond to them. Another participant questioned whether “being fine” constitutes an emotion and, if so, whether it should be understood as positive or negative. These reflections point to a gap in understanding around subtle, mixed, or masked emotions.

Overall, while participants demonstrated a strong self-rated capacity for empathy, the findings suggest that emotional interpretation is largely reliant on visible cues and familiarity, with less confidence in identifying complex or neutral emotional states. This reinforces the importance of EQ education that deepens emotional literacy and

expands individuals' ability to recognise and respond to a wider range of emotional experiences.

4.1.6. Social Skills

SELF-RATED SOCIAL SKILLS LEVELS (N = 50)



Participants were asked to rate their social skills, defined as the ability to build and maintain healthy relationships. Seventeen participants rated themselves at level 5, indicating that while they felt capable of initiating relationships, they experienced difficulty in sustaining them over time.

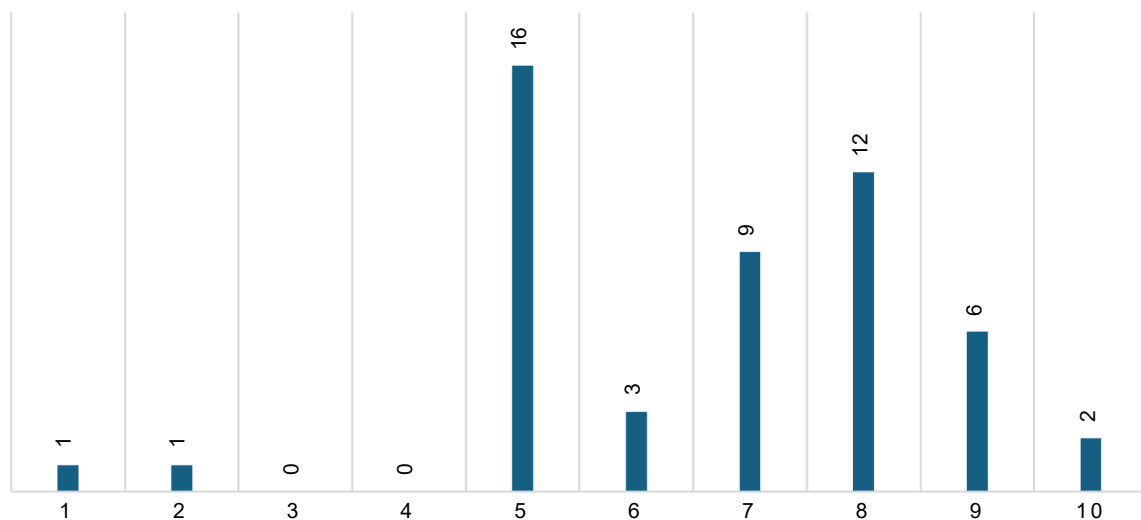
Several participants explained that maintaining relationships required consistent communication, emotional effort, and conflict management, which they found challenging to balance alongside personal, academic, or work-related demands. Some participants noted that misunderstandings, unexpressed emotions, and avoidance of difficult conversations often led to relationships weakening or ending altogether.

Participants who rated themselves higher described intentional communication, boundary-setting, and emotional awareness as key factors that supported their ability to maintain relationships. In contrast, those who rated themselves lower often linked their challenges to discomfort with confrontation, limited emotional expression, or uncertainty about how to respond to others' emotional needs.

The findings suggest that while many participants possess basic interpersonal skills, there is a notable gap in applying emotional intelligence (EQ) consistently within ongoing relationships. This highlights the importance of EQ education that focuses not only on initiating social connections but also on sustaining them through empathy, communication, emotional regulation, and constructive conflict resolution.

4.1.7. Confidence in Reading Others' Emotions

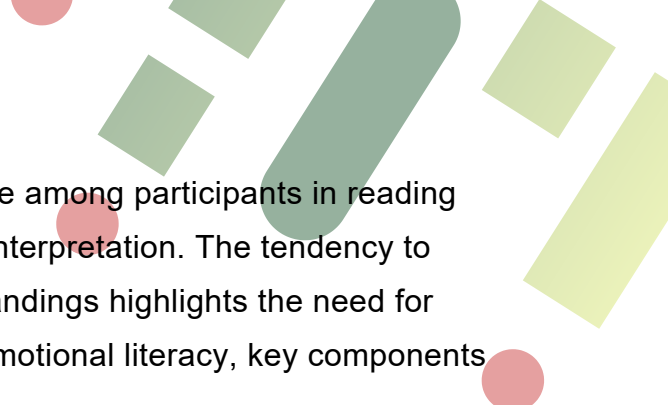
SELF-RATED CONFIDENCE IN READING OTHER PEOPLE'S EMOTIONS (N = 50)



As the interviews transitioned into more open-ended reflections, participants were asked to rate their confidence in their ability to read other people's emotions. Most participants (16) rated themselves as average, assigning a score of 5. A further 12 participants expressed higher confidence, rating themselves at 8.

Participants were subsequently asked, ***“Have you ever misread or misunderstood someone's emotions?”*** All participants confirmed that they had experienced this. However, the majority attributed these misunderstandings to the other person, citing a perceived lack of honesty about emotions or inconsistencies between what the person said and how they behaved.

Several participants noted that they were more likely to misread the emotions of individuals they did not know well or with whom they had limited familiarity. This suggests that emotional interpretation is strongly influenced by relational context and prior knowledge of the individual.



The findings indicate a moderate level of confidence among participants in reading emotions, alongside a universal experience of misinterpretation. The tendency to externalise responsibility for emotional misunderstandings highlights the need for increased self-reflection, perspective-taking, and emotional literacy, key components of emotional intelligence (EQ) development.

4.2. Interpretation of the Outcomes

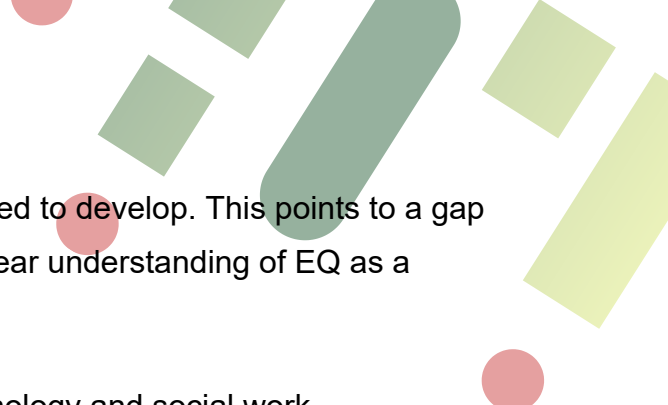
The findings from the Beyond the Words Campaign interviews provide important insights into how emotional intelligence (EQ) is currently experienced and practiced in everyday life, particularly within professional environments.

Participants reported that the workplace is the primary setting in which they interact with others and experience a wide range of emotions. However, despite this high level of emotional exposure, the workplace was consistently described as an environment where emotional expression is constrained. Participants indicated that emotions are frequently suppressed to avoid conflict, maintain professionalism, or prevent being perceived as emotionally weak. This suggests a significant gap between emotional experience and emotional expression in professional spaces.

Conversely, participants reported that emotional conversations and attentiveness to others' emotions occur more naturally in-personal environments, such as with family and close friends. When asked to provide examples of emotional expression, most participants referred to non-work-related contexts, highlighting that emotional engagement is often reserved for spaces perceived as safe and non-judgmental. This reinforces the need for workplace-focused EQ interventions that normalise healthy emotional expression and communication.

While participants generally rated themselves at moderate to high levels across EQ components, qualitative responses revealed notable limitations. Many participants identified difficulty managing common, everyday emotions such as anger, stress, and sadness. These findings suggest that despite frequent emotional exposure, individuals may lack the skills to regulate emotions constructively, particularly under pressure.

A key insight from the data is the limited emotional literacy among participants. Although most expressed a desire to improve their EQ, few were able to accurately



identify or name specific EQ components they wished to develop. This points to a gap between perceived emotional competence and a clear understanding of EQ as a structured skill set.

Participants with professional backgrounds in psychology and social work demonstrated greater emotional awareness and reflective capacity, underscoring the impact of formal training and exposure to emotional education. However, even among these participants, there was recognition that emotional competence is context-dependent and requires ongoing development.

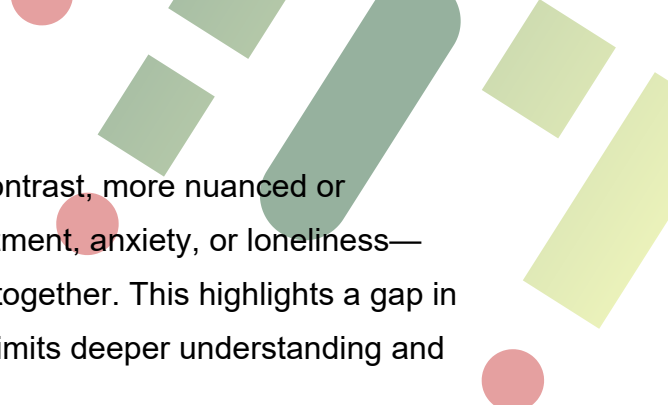
Empathy emerged as the highest self-rated EQ component. Despite this, many participants acknowledged a tendency to avoid emotional conversations, withdraw during emotional distress, or suppress emotions rather than communicate them effectively. This indicates that empathy alone is insufficient without complementary skills such as self-regulation, emotional articulation, and conflict navigation.

Overall, the findings reveal a strong need for accessible, practical EQ education that prioritises emotional awareness, emotional vocabulary, and constructive emotional engagement. The outcomes of the Beyond the Words Campaign highlight the value of early and sustained EQ interventions in strengthening communication, reducing emotional avoidance, and fostering healthier personal and professional relationships.

5. CONCLUSION

The Beyond the Words Campaign (BWC) 2025 has suggested that while emotions are a constant part of daily human interaction, emotional intelligence (EQ) is not inherently understood or easily practiced. Participants across age groups, sectors, and social contexts engage with emotions regularly, yet many struggle to accurately identify what they are feeling, to name emotions beyond basic categories, and to respond to emotions, both their own and others'—in constructive ways.

A consistent finding throughout the campaign was participants' reliance on primary emotions, particularly anger, joy, and sadness. These emotions were most easily recognised due to their frequent expression through observable cues such as facial



expressions, tone of voice, and body language. In contrast, more nuanced or secondary emotions—such as frustration, disappointment, anxiety, or loneliness—were often misinterpreted, overlooked, or avoided altogether. This highlights a gap in emotional vocabulary and emotional literacy, which limits deeper understanding and meaningful emotional engagement.

The findings further indicate that culture, upbringing, and social conditioning play a significant role in shaping how individuals relate to emotions. Participants reflected varying levels of comfort in expressing emotions, with some emotions perceived as inappropriate, embarrassing, or unsafe to display—particularly in professional environments. This was most evident in workplace settings, where participants reported frequent emotional experiences but limited emotional expression due to fear of conflict, judgment, or being perceived as unprofessional.

Notably, while many participants rated themselves relatively high across components of EQ, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and motivation, these self-assessments often did not align with their responses to open-ended and scenario-based questions. When required to identify emotions, explain emotional responses, or articulate how they would manage emotionally challenging situations, participants frequently struggled. This discrepancy suggests that self-perceived EQ may be overestimated, particularly in the absence of structured understanding and education on what EQ entails.

The campaign further revealed a widespread willingness to grow emotionally, with all participants indicating interest in improving aspects of their EQ. However, many lacked the language, tools, and conceptual clarity to identify specific areas for development. This reinforces the conclusion that EQ must be intentionally taught, practiced, and reinforced rather than assumed to develop naturally over time.

Overall, the Beyond the Words Campaign confirms that misunderstandings of emotions, both one's own and those of others, are common and deeply human. Physical cues remain the primary means of emotional interpretation, yet without deeper emotional awareness and active listening skills, these cues are often misread. The findings underscore the urgent need for accessible, contextually relevant EQ



education to strengthen emotional literacy, improve communication, and foster healthier relationships in homes, workplaces, and communities.

By focusing on active listening, emotion recognition, and reflective engagement, the Beyond the Words Campaign has laid a foundation for addressing these gaps. Continued investment in EQ education presents a meaningful opportunity to enhance personal well-being, reduce conflict, and contribute to more emotionally aware and resilient communities.