

The Psychological Perspective of Emotional Intelligence: Nurturing Connections and Fostering Success among the Youth

Ida Merlin J.¹, Dr. Prabakar S.^{2*}

Research Scholar¹, Department of Social Sciences, School of Social Sciences and Languages

Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India
idamerlin@outlook.com

Associate Professor Senior², Department of Social Sciences, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India

Corresponding author*: prabakar.s@vit.ac.in

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a vital role in the well-being and success of youth, particularly in their ability to nurture connections and achieve their goals. This article's objective is to focus on the previous studies on EI and find if emotional intelligence has helped in different outcomes in youth, explores the relationship between emotional intelligence, the cultivation of meaningful connections, and fostering success among youth in the light of psychology and provides psychological insights on how the youth can develop their emotional intelligence more effectively. Drawing on current research and literature, it highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in developing positive relationships, enhancing resilience, and promoting academic and personal achievement. Furthermore, it provides insights into practical strategies and interventions that can be implemented to nurture emotional intelligence and foster success among youth. By prioritising emotional intelligence development and fostering connections, youth can be empowered to navigate challenges, build meaningful relationships, and thrive in various domains of their lives.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, youth, connections, success, resilience, relationships, well-being, academic achievement, personal development

1. Introduction

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a metacognitive process that involves conscious critical thinking and working on the thought process involving emotions and regulating them according to the environment. If the world was perfect, all individuals would be mentally and emotionally healthy but that is not the case. Mental health in the youth is declining as the years go by. The rising numbers in the percentage of youth being anxious and depressed personally and in different social situations are unfathomable (Englander, 2021). Emotions play a vital role in individuals as they are primitive. College or university students are in a transitional stage where they experience change in their physical, emotional, cognitive and social selves. At this pivotal juncture, they are expected to make crucial decisions regarding their worldview, attitude towards life and values. Many factors including education, career advancement, and social expectations, might cause them to experience stress, which can manifest as emotional and relational discord within themselves (Feng and Zhan, 2015) and others. EI is increasingly recognised as a significant predictor of academic success, particularly among college students. Emotional intelligence has also been linked to improved psychological health (Austin & Egan, 2005), academic success (O'Boyle et al., 2011), and physiological well-being (Martins et al., 2010) in students. Research on Emotional Intelligence has evolved and is viewed as one of the prominent research topics in the past few decades. Different techniques and methodologies have been developed to measure and provide empirical evidence on emotional intelligence.

This article's objective is to focus on the previous studies on EI and find if emotional intelligence has helped in different outcomes in youth and provides psychological insights on how the youth can develop their emotional intelligence more effectively. This review paper also postulates that the relationship of emotional intelligence with

the external variables used in the previous studies helps build the quality of life among the youth. In this article, the term youth is referred to college or university students.

1.1 Psychology of Emotional Intelligence

The ability to recognise our emotions or difficulties and deal with them skilfully, both alone and in collaboration with others, is known as emotional intelligence. In social situations, one needs to empathise with the people around them and figure out how to have a positive impact on them. It is evident that there is a need for interpretation and that a person's angry outburst could be a cry for help or a loud laugh could be an emotion that has been pushed down in their mind. A person's emotional intelligence revolves around feelings like love, rage, worry, and also professional aspirations. People who have emotional intelligence do not rely on their initial sensations or inclinations. They are aware that rage may sometimes be a sign of melancholy and that hatred can disguise love. Additionally, it separates individuals who are demoralized by failure from those who can view their surroundings' problems with sorrow. Emotionally educated people see the usefulness of controlled pessimism in the larger framework of a healthy existence. Emotional intelligence is a skill that can be acquired. It may be developed by understanding oneself, the sources of one's emotions, the influences of one's upbringing, and the best ways to deal with one's fears and desires. Ben-Ze'ev (2001), claims that emotion may be described in terms of four common attributes: intensity, shortness, partiality, and instability. Emotional intelligence can be defined as the capacity to recognize, comprehend, and control one's moods and feelings and other people as well. However, one line does not sufficiently make sense of the value of the ability to understand people on a profound level unless studied intensively.

1.2 Definition and Components

EI can be identified as “the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotional Intelligence is a skill set that contributes to one's expressing, regulating, and using emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It is the ability of an individual to process emotional information (Mayer et al., 2008). Many different definitions of emotional intelligence have been given by many authors based on its model. Conflicts over conceptualization and measurement have hampered research on emotional intelligence. Some adhere to a theoretical concept in which emotional qualities make up emotional intelligence (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999) and others believe that emotional intelligence comprises several different emotional talents as well as parts of the personality (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1996). Emotional Intelligence is comprised of two theoretical approaches which are different but interconnected; Ability Emotional Intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) and Trait Emotional Intelligence (Petrides et al., 2007). Ability Emotional intelligence is a skill set that allows one to make constructive use of one's feelings, whereas trait emotional intelligence is a cluster of self-perceptions related to one's capacity to regulate one's emotions. Emotional intelligence has gained popularity among researchers in the past few decades, and there is a plethora of research studies on the emotional intelligence of people in different age groups and different settings (Furnham, 2014). The meta-cognitive processes of emotional intelligence have various aspects.

1. Emotional Awareness: Mayer and Salovey propose a model of emotional intelligence that includes the ability of a person to accurately perceive and understand emotions, known as emotional awareness. This concept is further supported by other researchers such as Bar-On (1997) and Goleman (1996)
2. Emotional Regulation: Gross (1998) identified strategies for the regulation of emotions, such as reappraisal and suppression, which involves modifying one's emotional experience
3. Emotional Reflection: Emotional reflection or self-reflection involves analysing and contemplating one's emotional experiences. This process allows individuals to gain insights into their emotions, triggers, and underlying reasons for their emotional responses.
4. Emotional Flexibility: It refers to the ability to adapt and adjust emotional responses based on situational demands.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of emotional intelligence encompasses various perspectives and models that seek to explain the nature, components and implications of this multifaceted concept. While several theoretical frameworks have developed over the years, two prominent theories have greatly influenced our understanding of emotional intelligence: the ability-based model and the mixed model.

The ability-based model, proposed by Mayer and Salovey in the early 1990s, defines EI as a set of cognitive abilities that involve the perception, understanding and regulation of emotions. In this model, EI comprises four core components. The first is the perception of emotions which involves recognizing and accurately interpreting one's own emotions as well as those of others. The second is the facilitation of emotional understanding, which encompasses comprehending the complex interplay of emotions, including how they evolve and change over time. The third component is the regulation of emotions. This includes harnessing positive emotions, mitigating negative emotions and adapting emotional responses to various situations. The final component is the utilization of emotions, which entails utilizing emotional information to facilitate problem-solving, decision-making, and interpersonal interactions.

In contrast, the mixed model, proposed by Daniel Goleman in the mid-1990s, incorporates both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of emotional intelligence. Goleman's model emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills in the realm of emotional intelligence. According to this framework, self-awareness involves recognizing and understanding one's own emotions, strengths, and limitations. Self-regulation encompasses managing one's emotions, impulses, and behaviour constructively and adaptively. Motivation refers to the intrinsic drive and resilience to pursue goals with passion and perseverance, even in the face of setbacks. Empathy encompasses the ability to understand and share the emotions of others, fostering meaningful connections and relationships. Lastly, social skills involve effectively communicating, collaborating, and resolving conflicts in social contexts. (Goleman, 1996)

While these two models provide valuable insights into the theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence, it is essential to recognize that emotional intelligence is a dynamic and evolving concept. Researchers continue to explore and refine different frameworks to capture the complexities of emotional intelligence. Additionally, various measurements and assessment tools have been developed to gauge individual levels of emotional intelligence, further contributing to the theoretical framework.

Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of emotional intelligence serves as a guide for personal development and informs interventions aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence skills. By comprehending the components and mechanisms involved in emotional intelligence, individuals and organizations can embark on a journey of self-awareness, self-improvement, and fostering positive emotional climates. Ultimately, a robust theoretical framework helps us appreciate the significance of emotional intelligence in shaping our emotional experiences, relationships, and overall well-being.

2. Importance of Emotional Intelligence among the Youth

2.1 Academic Performance and Success

Emotional intelligence has garnered significant attention for its potential impact on various aspects of human life, including academic performance. Numerous studies have explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic success, shedding light on how emotional intelligence can influence students' cognitive abilities (Ramos et al., 2007), motivation, social interactions, and overall academic achievement. For example, a study conducted by Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2006) found that emotional intelligence was positively associated with higher grades and academic achievement among university students. Similarly, in a study by Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, and Majeski (2004), higher emotional intelligence scores were linked to better academic performance in a sample of undergraduate students. One possible explanation for this relationship is that emotional intelligence enables students to effectively manage stress and anxiety, which are common challenges in academic settings. By recognizing and understanding their emotions, students with higher emotional intelligence can regulate their stress responses and employ adaptive coping mechanisms, leading to improved concentration, problem-solving abilities, and memory retention (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011). Emotional intelligence is distinctive and hence it has an impact on various areas in an individual or student's life. Research has shown that Emotional Intelligence has a positive impact on academic performance and overall success in

individuals. In the academic setting, students with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle stress, manage their time effectively, and establish positive relationships with their peers and teachers. They are more likely to be motivated, resilient, and self-regulated, which can lead to improved concentration, problem-solving skills, and overall academic performance. The achievement motivation in academic performance among students was significant with higher levels of emotional intelligence (Naik & Kiran, 2018).

2.2 Psychological well-being and mental health

Emotional Intelligence is also closely related to psychological well-being (Carmeli A et al., 2009; Malinauskas et al., 2020). It plays a significant role in psychological well-being by fostering self-awareness, regulation, empathy, social connections, conflict resolution and resilience (Nyugen, 2023). It has a positive impact on one's mental health and overall psychological well-being. Mental health and emotional intelligence are also well-connected. By fostering EI, mental health and well-being of youth can be empowered to form healthy relationships and thrive emotionally.

2.3 Interpersonal Relationship and Leadership

Emotional Intelligence also is coiled with interpersonal relationships. Without a certain level of emotional intelligence, maintaining good interpersonal relationships and developing social skills is quite arduous. Several studies have proved that interpersonal relationships are efficient with emotional intelligence (Schutte et al., 2001). Several studies have shown that Emotional Intelligence is very important in leadership. Emotionally intelligent leaders are more open to communication and are empathetic about others (Linvill, Gloria, 2023). A recent study showed the importance of the development of Emotional Intelligence in employees which in turn enhances positivity, harmony and cooperation among them (Xiao Hu, 2021) and building leadership skills helps in the professional development of individuals.

3. Factors Influencing Emotional Intelligence

3.1 Gender and Cultural factors

Multiple factors influence Emotional Intelligence in individuals. One of the basic factors is gender. There is a significant difference in the emotional world of male and female genders. Many studies have identified that the female gender has higher emotional intelligence than the male. The biological or molecular explanation suggests that women's biochemistry is better equipped to evaluate their own and others' emotions as survival factors. Women have greater emotional processing regions in their brains than males. (Gur et al., 2002) also, emotions are processed differently in the brains of men and women (Craig et al., 2009). The sociocultural explanation suggests that women are taught to value their emotions, men are trained to suppress those associated with grief, shame, vulnerability, and fear. (Montañés, & Latorre, 2008) Furthermore, women are more concerned with preventing the breakdown of interpersonal interactions and building pleasant social networks, thus they spend more time in social contact with the emotional world. (Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001). Some studies have proved that males have higher Emotional Intelligence than females (Ahamad et al., 2009). Several empirical investigations of emotion, supporting both biological and social reasons, find that women have superior emotional abilities. Based on the results of this research, it can be concluded that women have a deeper understanding of emotions, express good and negative feelings with more ease and frequency, and are more socially competent than males. (Hall & Mast, 2008)

The cultural differences and upbringing pertaining to each individual also influence their emotional intelligence. Some cultures are independent and others are interdependent. The emotional experience and expression of the youth in both these cultures are extremely different and hence it influences their emotional intelligence as well (Bagozzi et al., 1999) which has an effect on their social functioning (Brackett et al., 2006). Cultural norms and values, cultural dimensions (individualism vs collectivism, high context vs low context) and cultural sensitivity influence a person's emotional intelligence. Therefore, without the context of culture, the understanding of emotional intelligence would cease to exist (Huynh et al., 2018).

3.2 Educational Environment and Support System

Each person's personal background such as parental styles, educational experience, relationships and personal interconnections also contribute to their emotional intelligence. One key aspect of the educational environment is the incorporation of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs (Green et al., 2021). These programs provide explicit instruction on recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions, as well as developing empathy and building positive relationships. CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), a leading organization in the field, has identified five core competencies of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. By integrating SEL into the curriculum, schools create a conducive environment for students to acquire and apply these emotional competencies. The support system within the educational environment also contributes significantly to the development of emotional intelligence. School counsellors, psychologists, and other support staff members offer valuable resources to address students' emotional needs. These professionals provide individual or group counselling, and crisis intervention, and teach coping strategies for managing stress and emotional challenges. By addressing students' emotional well-being, schools promote a positive environment that nurtures emotional intelligence.

4. Enhancing Emotional Intelligence

Multiple models encompass the development of Emotional Intelligence in individuals, (Grant, 2007; Tucker 2010), especially in educational settings. Some use socio-emotional learning (SEL) in their curriculum to promote Emotional Intelligence in students (Wood, 2020). Several other programs contribute to the enhancement of emotional intelligence such as Emotional Intelligence 2.0 (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009), six seconds (Freedman & Fiedelvey-van Dijk, 2005; Fariselli et al., 2008), the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence and Daniel Goleman Emotional Intelligence Coaching Certification. There is evidence from recent studies that developing the competencies has magnified the prosocial behaviour (Wang et al., 2021) and academic performance of students (Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2020). Enhancing emotional intelligence helps in critical thinking, mindfulness and resilience. It helps focus on the metacognition in an individual (Haifat Maoulida et al., 2023). Self-reflection practices are highly associated with emotional intelligence (Freshwater et al., 2004; Seydi Shahivand et al., 2020) though it may seem strenuous when self-reflection is practised consciously, it helps build emotional intelligence. The development of EI also enhances mindfulness in individuals (Wang & Kong, 2014; Rodriguez-Ledo et al., 2018). With the help of a supportive campus environment and multiple resources, the youth can consciously practise and develop emotional intelligence at a faster pace.

5. Challenges and Barriers to Developing Emotional Intelligence

5.1 Lack of awareness and education

The first and foremost quality of emotional intelligence is the capacity for introspective self-awareness. A lack of awareness of one's emotions makes it harder to regulate them. This is one of the greatest barriers to developing emotional intelligence in an individual. Although many previous studies suggest that many students have high emotional intelligence, the majority of the students are not educated on what emotional intelligence is and hence they lack an awareness of how to develop it, as it is a skill that can be consciously developed. In this cutting-edge era, the youth are expected to come out of their comfort zones and adopt new ways of thinking and behaving. Some may resist change (Dent & Goldberg, 1999) and find it difficult to break old patterns and develop new skills. Overcoming this resistance and embracing personal growth can be a barrier to enhancing emotional intelligence. Even the stigma of societal expectations might hinder or inhibit them in the development of EI. Inadequate lexical knowledge of emotional vocabulary (Vainik, 2004) can hinder emotional intelligence development. Difficulty in accurately labelling and expressing emotions can impede effective communication and understanding of oneself and others. Expanding emotional vocabulary is crucial to better navigating and expressing emotions.

5.2 Stigma and Societal expectations

Cultural and societal norms can shape the way emotions are perceived and expressed. In some cultures, or environments, expressing emotions openly may be discouraged or stigmatized. This can create barriers for individuals in developing emotional intelligence as they may struggle with authentic emotional expression and empathy due to societal expectations. (Gunkel et al., 2014, 2016; Crowne, 2013). Past negative experiences or trauma can significantly impact emotional intelligence development. Individuals who have experienced trauma may struggle with emotional regulation, trust, and empathy. Healing from these experiences and seeking

professional support may be necessary to overcome these barriers. A lack of positive role models or supportive environments can impede the development of emotional intelligence. Having mentors, supportive peers, or access to resources and programs focused on emotional intelligence can provide guidance and encouragement, helping individuals overcome barriers and develop their emotional intelligence.

It's important to note that while these barriers may exist, they can be addressed and overcome with persistence, self-reflection, education, and support. Recognizing and acknowledging these barriers is the first step towards developing emotional intelligence and working towards personal growth.

6. Conclusion

Emotional Intelligence is a critical factor in the psychological, professional and academic success of college students. Investing in the emotional intelligence of youth is crucial for their holistic development and long-term well-being. By nurturing emotional intelligence, the youth are empowered with the skills and resilience needed to navigate life's challenges and thrive in their personal and professional pursuits. This article has provided an overview of emotional intelligence in youth, highlighted its importance in various areas of their lives, discussed factors influencing emotional intelligence, and proposed strategies for enhancing emotional intelligence in different settings. By prioritizing the cultivation of emotional intelligence among youth, fostering a generation that is empathetic, self-aware, and equipped to build a brighter future for themselves and society at large, they can improve their academic performance, mental health, interpersonal relationships and overall well-being, paving the way for success in their personal and professional lives.

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