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Emotional Intelligence and Its Psychological Determinants: An Integrative Review

Inayat Ul Haq
PhD Research Scholar, HITEC University Taxila
Dr. Jawad Haseeb
Lecturer, HITEC University, Taxila

Abstract
Emotional intelligence (EI) is a pivotal psychological construct linked to academic achievement, adaptive functioning, and psychosocial well-being. Despite extensive research on EI, limited attention has been devoted to a systematic examination of its underlying determinants within undergraduate populations in developing contexts. This article investigates the key psychological factors influencing emotional intelligence among undergraduate students enrolled in universities in Wah Cantt, Pakistan. Grounded in established frameworks of emotional, biological, and developmental psychology, the study examines biological and neurological predispositions, developmental influences including parenting styles and childhood experiences, the educational ecosystem, and socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and socio-economic status. Derived from the theoretical foundation of a doctoral dissertation, the study adopts a descriptive and integrative analytical approach supported by relevant empirical literature. The findings underscore the multidimensional nature of emotional intelligence, demonstrating that EI emerges from the dynamic interaction between innate capacities and environmental conditions, with developmental and educational contexts exerting particularly strong influence during early adulthood. The study contributes to the psychological literature by offering a comprehensive synthesis of EI determinants and provides evidence-based insights for higher education institutions seeking to promote emotional competence and holistic student development.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Determinants, Developmental Factors, Educational Environment, Socio-Demographic Influences*

Introduction to the Construct of Intelligence and Emotion

The construct of intelligence, for the better part of the twentieth century, was dominated by a monolithic view that equated intellectual capability with cognitive processing speed, abstract reasoning, and memory. This traditional paradigm, often encapsulated in the "psychometric g" or general intelligence factor spearheaded by Charles Spearman and Alfred Binet, viewed emotions as the antithesis of reason, chaotic forces that disrupted logical thought rather than enhanced it. However, the trajectory of psychological science has witnessed a profound paradigm shift, moving from this "Cognitive Era" to what might be termed the "Affective Era," where the ability to navigate the emotional landscape is viewed not merely as a soft skill, but as a legitimate and measurable form of intelligence. This shift did not occur in a vacuum; it was the result of decades of theoretical dissent by psychologists who recognized that the ability to succeed in life required more than the ability to solve algebraic equations.

Objectives

1. To examine the role of biological and neurological factors in the development of emotional intelligence.
2. To analyze the influence of developmental factors, particularly parenting practices and childhood experiences, on emotional intelligence.
3. To investigate the impact of the educational ecosystem, including teaching practices and institutional climate, on emotional intelligence development.
4. To assess the relationship between socio-demographic variables (such as gender, age, and socio-economic background) and emotional intelligence.
5. To provide evidence-based insights to inform educational strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence.

Methodology

This study employs a pure qualitative, conceptual and narrative review methodology to examine the psychological determinants of emotional intelligence. Rather than generating primary data, the article synthesizes findings from established theoretical models and empirical studies drawn from the fields of emotional, developmental, educational, and personality psychology. A systematic search of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and authoritative academic sources was conducted using major scholarly databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The literature was selected based on its relevance to emotional intelligence and its associated biological, developmental, educational, and socio-demographic factors.

Literature Review

To understand Emotional Intelligence (EI) as it is conceptualized today for undergraduate students, one must first trace this historical evolution from the early recognition of "social intelligence" to the formal operationalization of EI.

- **Historical Evolution of Intelligence: The Pre-EI Era**

Long before the term "Emotional Intelligence" entered the lexicon of popular psychology, early pioneers in the field of psychometrics were already wrestling with the limitations of standard intelligence testing. In 1920, Edward L. Thorndike, a distinguished psychologist at Columbia University, published a groundbreaking article in *Harper's Magazine* titled "Intelligence and Its Uses." In this text, Thorndike challenged the prevailing notion that intelligence was a single entity. He proposed that intelligence could be divided into three distinct classes: abstract intelligence (the ability to understand and manage ideas), mechanical intelligence (the ability to understand and manage concrete objects), and social intelligence (Thorndike, 1920).[1]

Thorndike defined social intelligence as "the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls, to act wisely in human relations" (Thorndike, 1920).[2] This was a radical departure from the academic orthodoxy of the time. Thorndike argued that a person could be intellectually brilliant in the abstract sense, capable of mastering complex philosophy or mathematics, yet utterly inept in social situations. He posited that the ability to read social cues and respond effectively was a distinct "power," separate from the abstract reasoning measured by the Binet-Simon scales. Although Thorndike's concept of social intelligence was difficult to measure at the time, leading to its temporary recession in psychological literature, it planted the seed for the future integration of emotion and intellect.

Following Thorndike, the mid-20th century saw further challenges to the IQ-centric model. David Wechsler, the creator of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) which remains the gold standard for IQ testing today, was a vocal critic of the idea that IQ tests captured the entirety of human potential. In his 1943 paper, "non-intellective factors in general intelligence," Wechsler argued that what we call "intelligence" is not merely the sum of cognitive abilities but is also influenced by "non-intellective" factors (Wechsler, 1943).[3] He identified these factors as affective, personal, and social traits, specifically drive, persistence, and the ability to perceive social situations. Wechsler famously stated that "we cannot expect to measure total intelligence until our tests also include some measures of these non-intellective factors" (Wechsler, 1943).[4] His assertion laid the theoretical groundwork for the idea that emotional functioning is an integral part of intelligent behavior, rather than a separate or opposing force. Despite Wechsler's stature, however, the behaviorist dominance of the era meant that these "non-intellective" factors were largely sidelined in favor of easily quantifiable cognitive metrics until the cognitive revolution of the 1980s.

- **The Theory of Multiple Intelligences**

The most significant blow to the unitary theory of intelligence came in 1983 with the publication of Howard Gardner's seminal book, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Gardner, a Harvard psychologist, argued that the traditional view of intelligence was too narrow and culturally biased toward linguistic and logical-

mathematical abilities. He proposed that humans possess a plurality of intelligences, each relatively independent of the others. Among his original list of seven intelligences, two are universally recognized as the direct precursors to Emotional Intelligence: "Intrapersonal Intelligence" and "Interpersonal Intelligence" (Gardner, 1983).[5]

Interpersonal intelligence, as defined by Gardner, is the ability to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people. It allows an individual to work effectively with others, akin to Thorndike's social intelligence. Conversely, intrapersonal intelligence is the capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of one's own desires, fears, and capacities, and to use that information effectively in regulating one's own life (Gardner, 1983).[6] Gardner's contribution was pivotal because he elevated these abilities to the status of "intelligence." They were no longer viewed as mere personality traits or "soft skills," but as complex computational capacities of the human brain that could be developed or stunted by environmental factors. For the undergraduate student, Gardner's theory validated the idea that understanding oneself and navigating peer relationships were intellectual endeavors as critical as passing a calculus exam.

- **The Formal Emergence of EI (1990)**

While Gardner provided the fertile soil, the specific construct of "Emotional Intelligence" was formally introduced to the academic world by Wayne Payne in his 1985 doctoral dissertation, *A Study of Emotion: Developing Emotional Intelligence*. Payne argued that the suppression of emotion in civilized society had led to a mass "emotional ignorance," and he called for an education system that integrated emotional learning (Payne, 1985).[7] However, as a dissertation, this work remained largely obscure.

The true scientific birth of EI occurred in 1990, when two psychologists, Peter Salovey of Yale University and John D. Mayer of the University of New Hampshire, published a landmark article simply titled "Emotional Intelligence" in the journal *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*. Salovey and Mayer reviewed the fragmented literature on social intelligence and emotion, synthesizing it into a cohesive framework. They defined Emotional Intelligence as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).[8]

This 1990 paper was revolutionary because it was the first to empirically demonstrate that EI could be measured as a mental ability, distinct from standard IQ and personality traits. Salovey and Mayer conceptualized emotion not as a chaotic disruption, but as a source of information. Just as a verbal intelligence test measures the ability to process words, they argued that EI measures the ability to process emotional information. They proposed that emotions have logic and structure, and that some individuals are naturally more adept at perceiving this structure than others. This laid the foundation for EI as a serious subject of scientific inquiry, distinct from the self-help movement.

- **The Popularization Phase (1995-Present)**

If Salovey and Mayer built the engine of Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman put the fuel in it. In 1995, Goleman, a science writer for *The New York Times*, published *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. This book exploded onto the global stage, gracing the cover of *TIME* magazine and becoming an international bestseller. Goleman took the academic work of Salovey and Mayer and expanded it, arguing that EI was the "master aptitude" underlying all other skills (Goleman, 1995).[9]

Goleman's contribution was to shift the focus of EI from a strictly clinical or academic definition to a pragmatic one focused on success, leadership, and well-being. He famously argued that while IQ might contribute to about 20% of the factors that determine life success, the remaining 80% is determined by other forces, chief among them Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995).[10] This claim resonated deeply with educators and business leaders who had long observed that the smartest students (in

terms of grades) were not always the most successful in life. Goleman's work led to the rapid integration of EI into school curricula (Social and Emotional Learning, or SEL) and corporate training programs. For the university sector in Pakistan and globally, Goleman's work highlighted a critical gap: higher education was rigorously training the cognitive brain while leaving the emotional brain largely uneducated.

Factors Influencing Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is not a static endowment fixed at birth; rather, it is a dynamic construct shaped by a complex interplay of biological, developmental, educational, and socio-demographic forces. Unlike IQ, which tends to remain relatively stable after late adolescence, EI is highly plastic and responsive to environmental influence. Understanding these influencing factors is critical for the present study, as it helps explain *why* undergraduate students in Pakistan may exhibit varying levels of emotional competence.

- **Biological and Neurological Factors**

At its core, Emotional Intelligence is a physiological process rooted in neuroanatomy. As discussed in previous sections regarding the "Amygdala Hijack," the neural architecture of the brain dictates the baseline for emotional processing. The primary structures involved are the Limbic System (the emotional center) and the Prefrontal Cortex (the executive center).

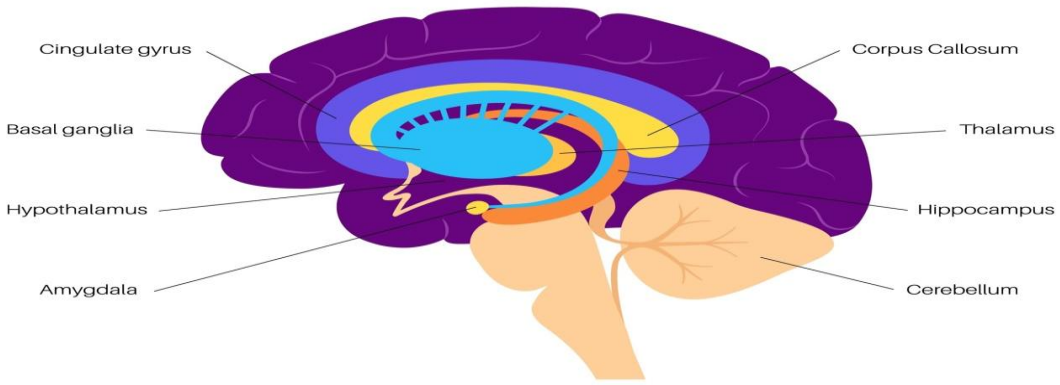

Figure 1: Neuroanatomy of the Limbic System

A crucial biological factor influencing EI is "Neuroplasticity", the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. Research by Davidson and Begley (2012) suggests that the circuits responsible for emotional regulation are among the most plastic in the brain. This means that repeated experiences can physically alter the brain's structure. For a university student, this is a hopeful finding: it implies that even if a student has a biologically reactive amygdala (prone to anxiety), they can "rewire" their brain through consistent practice of self-regulation techniques. This biological malleability underpins the entire premise that EI can be taught and improved in an educational setting (Davidson & Begley, 2012).[11]

- **Developmental Factors: Parenting and Childhood**

While biology provides the hardware, early childhood experiences provide the software. The most significant developmental factor influencing EI is the *Parenting Style* experienced during formative years.

Parenting Styles

Drawing on the foundational work of Diana Baumrind (1991), parenting styles are generally categorized into three types:

1. **Authoritarian:** High demands, low responsiveness. These parents suppress emotional expression ("Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about").
2. **Permissive:** Low demands, high responsiveness. These parents accept all emotions but provide no guidance on how to handle them.

3. **Authoritative:** High demands, high responsiveness. These parents validate emotions but set limits on behavior.

Research consistently shows that students raised by **Authoritative** parents tend to have significantly higher EI. They learn that their feelings are valid but that their reactions must be managed (Baumrind, 1991). Conversely, students from authoritarian backgrounds often struggle with *Self-Awareness* (because they were taught to ignore their feelings), while those from permissive backgrounds struggle with *Self-Regulation* (because they were never taught to control them).

John Gottman (1997) further refined this by identifying "Emotion Coaching" parents. These parents view their child's negative emotions (anger, sadness) not as a nuisance, but as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching. They label emotions and help the child solve problems. Students who received this "emotion coaching" arrive at university better equipped to handle academic stress, resolve peer conflicts, and self-soothe during crises (Gottman, 1997).[12]

- **The Educational Ecosystem**

Once a child enters the education system, the school environment becomes a primary influencer of EI. Unfortunately, in many contexts, including the prevalent system in Pakistan, the educational ecosystem may hinder rather than help EI development.

The formal curriculum focuses on cognitive skills (math, science), but the "hidden curriculum", the unwritten rules of schooling, often teaches emotional suppression. In systems that prioritize rote memorization and high-stakes testing, the message sent to students is that "logic is superior to emotion" and that "mistakes are failures" rather than learning opportunities. This creates an environment of fear rather than psychological safety. When the brain is in a state of fear (amygdala activation), learning is inhibited. A system that relies heavily on extrinsic motivation (grades/fear of failure) actively erodes the intrinsic motivation required for high EI (Zeidner et al., 2009).[13]

At the university level, the presence or absence of mentorship is a critical factor. High EI is often modeled through observation. If professors act merely as content dispensers rather than mentors, students lose the opportunity to observe how a mature adult handles intellectual frustration, disagreement, or stress. The gap in mentorship leaves students to navigate their emotional development in a vacuum, often relying on immature peer groups for guidance.

- **Socio-Demographic Factors**

Finally, empirical research highlights the influence of demographic variables such as age and gender on EI.

Virtually all studies on EI, including large-scale normative studies of the EQ-i, demonstrate a positive correlation between age and Emotional Intelligence (Bar-On & Parker, 2000).[14] This phenomenon, known as the "Maturity Effect," suggests that EI increases as individuals accumulate life experience. For undergraduate students, this is significant because they are often in a transitional phase, neurologically and socially, between adolescence and adulthood. Their prefrontal cortex is still maturing (a process does not complete until the mid-20s), which partially explains why emotional regulation is often inconsistent in this demographic.

Gender is another influential factor, though often misunderstood. Meta-analyses typically show that women tend to score higher on sub-scales related to *Empathy*, *Interpersonal Relationships*, and *Social Responsibility*. Men, conversely, often score higher on *Stress Tolerance*, *Assertiveness*, and *Self-Regard* (Bar-On & Parker, 2000).[15] It is crucial to note that these differences are likely the result of socialization, how boys and girls are raised to express emotion, rather than biological immutability. In the context of a co-educational university in Wah Cantt, these gender dynamics play a role in how male and female students approach group work, leadership, and conflict resolution.

Conclusions

1. Emotional intelligence is a complex and multidimensional psychological construct that emerges through the dynamic interaction of biological, developmental, educational, and socio-demographic factors rather than functioning as a fixed or isolated trait.
2. Biological and neurological predispositions provide the foundational capacity for emotional processing; however, these innate factors alone are insufficient to explain individual differences in emotional intelligence.
3. Developmental influences, particularly parenting practices and early childhood emotional socialization, play a critical role in shaping core emotional competencies such as emotional awareness, regulation, and empathy.
4. The educational ecosystem significantly contributes to emotional intelligence development by reinforcing emotional skills through instructional practices, institutional climate, and social interactions.
5. Socio-demographic factors influence emotional intelligence indirectly by shaping individuals' exposure to emotional learning opportunities and social environments.
6. An integrative psychological framework is essential for achieving a comprehensive understanding of emotional intelligence, as single-factor explanations fail to capture its developmental and contextual complexity.

Recommendations

1. Educational institutions should systematically integrate emotional intelligence development into curricula through evidence-based socio-emotional learning initiatives grounded in psychological research.
2. Teacher education and professional development programs should emphasize emotionally responsive pedagogical practices and the creation of supportive learning environments.
3. Policymakers should prioritize early developmental interventions and parental support programs that promote healthy emotional socialization from childhood onward.
4. Researchers should employ longitudinal and cross-cultural research designs to examine the evolving and interactive nature of emotional intelligence determinants across diverse populations.
5. Future studies should focus on developing and empirically testing integrative models of emotional intelligence that account for biological, developmental, educational, and socio-demographic influences.
6. Higher education stakeholders should adopt holistic student development approaches that recognize emotional intelligence as a critical component of academic success and psychological well-being.

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