

Emotional Intelligence and Depression Among University Students: An Empirical Study on Psychological Well-being

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1. Abstract

Mental health has become a growing concern among university students due to academic pressure, social challenges, and career uncertainty. This study examines the relationship between emotional intelligence and depression among university students. Emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions, is considered a crucial psychological resource influencing mental well-being.

A quantitative research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 50 university students using structured questionnaires. Statistical tools such as percentage analysis, correlation, and regression were used to analyze the data.

The findings reveal a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and depression. Students with higher emotional intelligence demonstrated lower levels of depressive symptoms, better emotional regulation, and improved coping mechanisms. Emotional intelligence components such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills were found to play a critical role in reducing psychological distress.

The study concludes that emotional intelligence acts as a protective factor against depression and highlights the importance of integrating emotional skill development programs in educational institutions.

Key words

Emotional intelligence, Depression, University Students

2. Introduction

Mental health is a vital component of overall well-being, influencing how individuals think, feel, and behave in their daily lives. In the contemporary world, rapid technological advancements, globalization, and increasing competition have significantly impacted the mental health of individuals, particularly university students. Students are exposed to various stressors such as academic pressure, career uncertainty, social expectations, and personal challenges, making them vulnerable to mental health issues like depression.

Depression is a serious psychological disorder characterized by persistent sadness, lack of interest, low energy, and feelings of worthlessness. It negatively affects cognitive functioning, emotional stability, and physical health. Among university students, depression has emerged as a major concern due to transitional life phases involving identity formation, independence, and social adjustment.

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in managing emotions and maintaining psychological balance. It refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own emotions as well as those of others. According to Salovey and Mayer, emotional intelligence involves emotional perception,

understanding, and management, while Goleman emphasizes emotional competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, and social skills.

The theoretical foundation of this study is supported by multiple frameworks. The Emotional Intelligence Theory explains how emotional abilities influence behavior and mental health. Beck's Cognitive Theory of depression highlights the role of negative thinking patterns in developing depressive symptoms. Additionally, the Behavioral Theory emphasizes lack of positive reinforcement, while the Psychodynamic Theory links depression to unresolved emotional conflicts.

Despite extensive research on emotional intelligence and depression, limited studies have examined their relationship in the context of university students, particularly within the Indian and Gujarat context. There is a need to understand how emotional intelligence can act as a protective factor against depression among students.

Therefore, the present study aims to analyze the relationship between emotional intelligence and depression and to explore how emotional intelligence influences students' psychological well-being.

3. Review of Literature

Existing literature strongly supports the relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health. Schutte et al. (2002) developed a self-report emotional intelligence scale and found that individuals with higher emotional intelligence experienced lower depression and better life satisfaction. Similarly, Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2006) identified emotional intelligence as a significant predictor of mental health, with emotional clarity and regulation reducing depression and anxiety.

Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso (2004) established emotional intelligence as a scientifically valid construct influencing emotional regulation and psychological adjustment. Austin et al. (2005) found that emotional intelligence enhances well-being and reduces depression among university students. Petrides et al. (2007) further confirmed a strong negative correlation between emotional intelligence and emotional distress.

Indian studies also support these findings. Singh and Sharma (2012) found that emotional intelligence reduces academic stress, which is a major contributor to depression. Kumar and Muniandy (2014) reported a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and depression among college students. Goleman and Sahay (2016) emphasized emotional intelligence as a determinant of emotional stability and mental health.

Regional studies in Gujarat provide contextual relevance. Patel and Desai (2017) found that students with higher emotional intelligence experienced better psychological well-being. Shah (2019) observed that emotional intelligence significantly reduces stress among university students in Vadodara. Trivedi and Joshi (2021) confirmed a strong negative relationship between emotional intelligence and depression in Gujarat-based students.

Meta-analytical studies such as Martins et al. (2010) demonstrate that emotional intelligence consistently predicts lower psychological distress. Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera (2016) highlighted emotional intelligence as a key factor in reducing depression and enhancing resilience.

Despite extensive research, most studies focus on emotional intelligence or depression independently, with limited integrated analysis in student populations. This study addresses this gap by examining both variables together in a unified framework.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To assess the level of emotional intelligence among university students
- To identify the level of depression among university students
- To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and depression
- To analyze the impact of emotional intelligence components on depression
- To suggest strategies for improving mental health through emotional intelligence

5. Research Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative research approach with a descriptive research design. This design is suitable for examining relationships between variables without manipulation.

A cross-sectional method was used to collect data at a single point in time. The population includes university students from different academic backgrounds. A sample of 50 respondents was selected using convenience sampling due to accessibility and time constraints.

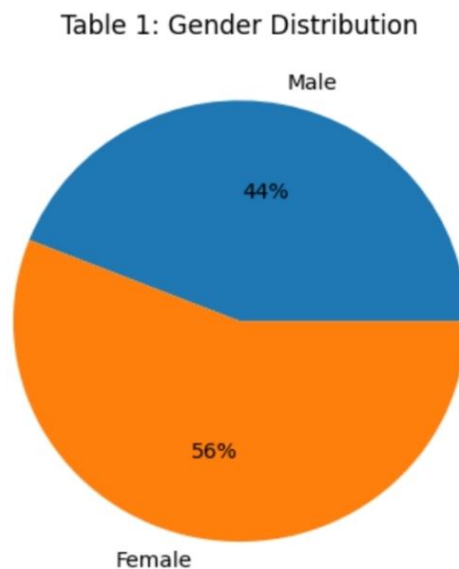
Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into three sections: demographic details, emotional intelligence scale, and depression scale. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure responses. Secondary data were collected from journals, books, and academic databases.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, percentage analysis, correlation, and regression techniques. Reliability was ensured through standardized scales, and validity was maintained through expert review and established instruments.

6. Data Interpretation and Analysis

Table 1: Gender Distribution

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	22	44%
Female	28	56%

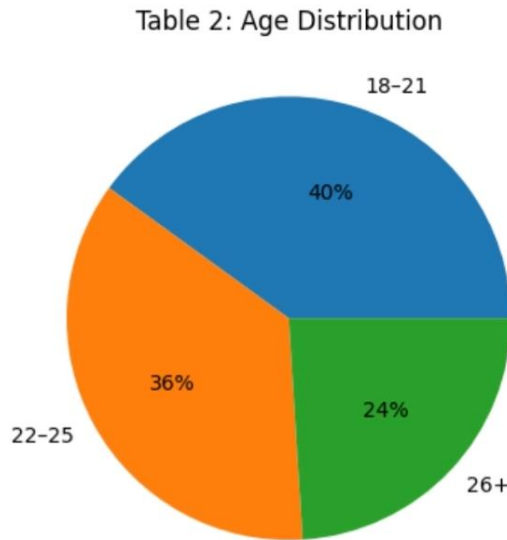


Interpretation:

The sample shows a slightly higher proportion of female respondents. This indicates balanced gender representation, allowing for generalizable insights across both groups.

Table 2: Age Distribution

Category	Frequency	Percentage
18–21	20	40%
22–25	18	36%
26+	12	24%

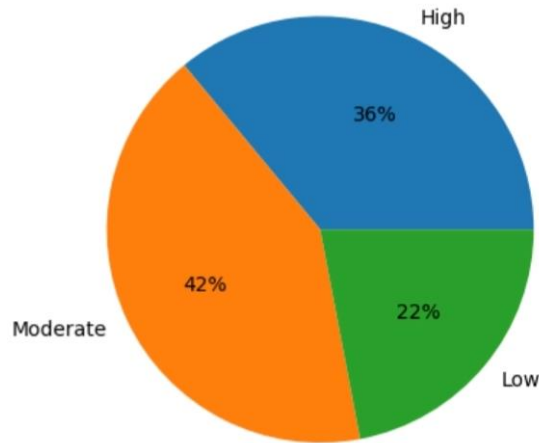


Interpretation:

Most respondents fall within the younger age group, indicating higher exposure to academic stress and transitional life challenges.

Table 3: Emotional Intelligence Level

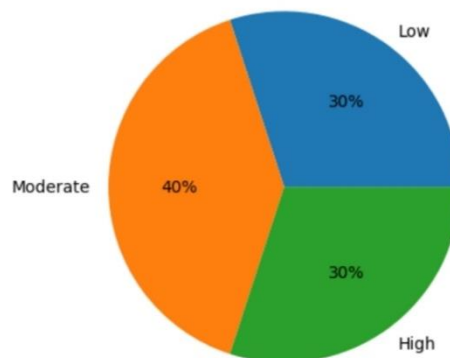
Category	Frequency	Percentage
High	18	36%
Moderate	21	42%
Low	11	22%

Table 3: Emotional Intelligence Level

Interpretation:

The majority of students have moderate emotional intelligence, suggesting scope for improvement in emotional skills development.

Table 4: Depression Level

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low	15	30%
Moderate.	20.	40%
High.	15	30%

Table 4: Depression Level

Interpretation:

A significant proportion of students experience moderate to high levels of depression, indicating a serious mental health concern.

7. Significance of the Study

This study holds both academic and practical significance. Academically, it contributes to the existing literature by integrating emotional intelligence and depression within a unified framework. It strengthens theoretical understanding by linking emotional intelligence theory with cognitive and behavioral perspectives of depression.

From a practical perspective, the study provides valuable insights for educational institutions, policymakers, and mental health professionals. It highlights the importance of emotional intelligence as a protective factor against depression. Universities can implement emotional intelligence training programs, counseling services, and awareness campaigns to promote mental well-being.

The study also benefits students by encouraging the development of emotional skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and stress management. These skills enhance academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall life satisfaction.

8. Conclusion

The present study confirms that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in reducing depression among university students. Students with higher emotional intelligence demonstrate better emotional regulation, coping mechanisms, and psychological resilience.

The findings reveal a strong negative relationship between emotional intelligence and depression, indicating that emotional skills significantly influence mental health outcomes. Components such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills contribute to emotional stability and reduce vulnerability to depression.

The study emphasizes the need for integrating emotional intelligence development into educational systems. By promoting emotional well-being, institutions can create supportive environments that enhance student performance and overall quality of life.

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