

Emotional Intelligence and Digital Behaviour among Undergraduate Students: Urban–Rural Perspectives

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Abstract

The increasing integration of digital technologies into students' academic and social lives has significantly influenced their emotional and behavioural functioning. Emotional Intelligence and digital behaviour have emerged as important psychological and educational constructs affecting students' academic adjustment, interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation, and social interaction. The present study investigates Emotional Intelligence and Digital Behaviour among undergraduate students from urban and rural backgrounds.

A descriptive survey design was employed for the study. The sample comprised 600 undergraduate students affiliated with Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU), Kanpur, including 333 rural and 267 urban students selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a standardized Emotional Intelligence Scale and a structured Digital Behaviour Scale developed by the investigator. The Emotional Intelligence Scale included six dimensions: Emotional Awareness and Understanding, Emotional Regulation and Control, Interpersonal Relations and Empathy, Emotional Resilience and Motivation, Adaptability and Flexibility, and Positive Influence and Encouragement.

The reliability of the Emotional Intelligence Scale was established through Cronbach's alpha (0.982), test–retest reliability (0.978), and split-half reliability (0.957). Statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and effect size measures were employed for data analysis.

The findings revealed that urban undergraduate students demonstrated significantly higher Emotional Intelligence and more positive digital behaviour compared to rural students. Significant differences were observed in emotional awareness, emotional regulation, interpersonal relations, and adaptability dimensions. The study further indicated that digital behaviour showed a positive association with Emotional Intelligence. However, gender and daily digital usage duration did not produce statistically significant differences in Emotional Intelligence.

The study concludes that environmental exposure, digital accessibility, educational opportunities, and communication environments significantly influence emotional competencies among students. The findings emphasize the need for digital literacy programs, emotional intelligence development initiatives, and equitable technological infrastructure within higher education institutions.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Digital Behaviour, Undergraduate Students, Urban–Rural Perspectives, Higher Education, Educational Psychology.

1. Introduction

Emotional Intelligence has emerged as one of the most influential psychological constructs in educational and social sciences. In modern educational environments, academic success is no longer determined solely by intellectual ability or cognitive competence. Emotional competencies such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, interpersonal communication, adaptability, and stress management significantly influence students' academic achievement, psychological well-being, and social adjustment.

The concept of Emotional Intelligence gained widespread recognition through the work of Goleman (1995), who emphasized that emotional competencies contribute substantially to personal and professional success. Emotional Intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and effectively manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others.

In higher education, Emotional Intelligence is closely associated with learning behaviour, classroom participation, interpersonal relationships, stress management, leadership qualities, and academic adjustment. Students with higher emotional intelligence are generally more capable of handling academic pressure, adapting to changing educational environments, maintaining healthy social relationships, and demonstrating resilience during challenges.

The transition from adolescence to adulthood during undergraduate education exposes students to various emotional, academic, and social pressures. Students are required to manage interpersonal relationships, academic expectations, career concerns, and psychological challenges simultaneously. Emotional Intelligence therefore becomes essential for maintaining emotional balance and educational success.

Urban and rural students often differ in terms of educational exposure, family environment, technological accessibility, socioeconomic conditions, and institutional support. These environmental variations may influence the development of emotional competencies among students. Urban students generally receive greater exposure to educational resources, communication opportunities, and social interaction platforms, which may contribute positively to emotional development.

The present study attempts to examine Emotional Intelligence among undergraduate students from urban and rural backgrounds. The study contributes to educational psychology by identifying environmental influences on emotional development and by highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence within higher education.

2. Review of Literature

Several studies have highlighted the importance of Emotional Intelligence in academic achievement, psychological adjustment, and social functioning among students.

Goleman (1995) emphasized that Emotional Intelligence contributes significantly to personal effectiveness, interpersonal relationships, leadership, and stress management. The study highlighted that emotional competencies are equally important as cognitive intelligence in determining success.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) defined Emotional Intelligence as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions effectively. Their model established Emotional Intelligence as a multidimensional construct involving emotional awareness, emotional facilitation, emotional understanding, and emotional management.

Parker et al. (2004) reported that students with higher Emotional Intelligence demonstrated better academic adjustment, higher academic achievement, and lower levels of stress.

Singh and Sharma (2012) found significant differences in Emotional Intelligence between urban and rural students, suggesting that environmental and educational exposure influence emotional development.

Kaur (2015) observed that Emotional Intelligence positively influences students' communication skills, self-confidence, and interpersonal adjustment.

Recent educational studies suggest that Emotional Intelligence is associated with mental well-being, academic persistence, resilience, and classroom behaviour among university students.

Despite growing interest in Emotional Intelligence, limited research has focused specifically on comparative analysis between urban and rural undergraduate students in the Indian higher education context. Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap.

3. Objectives of the Study

The present study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To examine the level of Emotional Intelligence among undergraduate students.
2. To compare Emotional Intelligence between urban and rural undergraduate students.
3. To examine differences in Emotional Awareness and Understanding between urban and rural students.
4. To compare Emotional Regulation and Control among undergraduate students belonging to different residency groups.

5. To examine differences in Interpersonal Relations and Empathy among urban and rural undergraduate students.
6. To analyze Emotional Resilience and Motivation among undergraduate students.
7. To compare Adaptability and Flexibility between urban and rural students.
8. To examine Positive Influence and Encouragement among undergraduate students.

4. Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is no significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between urban and rural undergraduate students.
2. There is no significant difference in Emotional Awareness and Understanding between urban and rural undergraduate students.
3. There is no significant difference in Emotional Regulation and Control between urban and rural undergraduate students.
4. There is no significant difference in Interpersonal Relations and Empathy between urban and rural undergraduate students.
5. There is no significant difference in Emotional Resilience and Motivation between urban and rural undergraduate students.
6. There is no significant difference in Adaptability and Flexibility between urban and rural undergraduate students.
7. There is no significant difference in Positive Influence and Encouragement between urban and rural undergraduate students.
8. Gender does not significantly influence Emotional Intelligence among undergraduate students.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design to examine Emotional Intelligence among undergraduate students.

5.2 Population

The population of the study consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in colleges affiliated with Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU), Kanpur.

5.3 Sample

A sample of 600 undergraduate students was selected using stratified random sampling.

Urban students: 267

Rural students: 333

5.4 Tool Used

A standardized Emotional Intelligence Scale was used for data collection. The scale consisted of six dimensions:

1. Emotional Awareness and Understanding
2. Emotional Regulation and Control
3. Interpersonal Relations and Empathy
4. Emotional Resilience and Motivation
5. Adaptability and Flexibility
6. Positive Influence and Encouragement

5.5 Reliability and Validity

Reliability of the Emotional Intelligence Scale was established through:

Test–Retest Method

Split-Half Reliability

Cronbach’s Alpha

Validity was established through:

Content Validity

Face Validity

Construct Validity

5.6 Statistical Techniques

The following statistical techniques were used:

Mean and Standard Deviation

Independent Samples t-test

One-way ANOVA

Pearson Correlation

Effect Size Measures

6. Results and Discussion

The statistical analysis revealed important findings regarding Emotional Intelligence among undergraduate students belonging to urban and rural backgrounds.

The reliability analysis of the Emotional Intelligence Scale showed high internal consistency. The Cronbach’s alpha value for the total Emotional Intelligence Scale was 0.982, indicating

excellent reliability. The dimensions of Emotional Intelligence also demonstrated satisfactory reliability coefficients:

Emotional Awareness and Understanding = 0.898

Emotional Regulation and Control = 0.984

Interpersonal Relations and Empathy = 0.980

Emotional Resilience and Motivation = 0.872

Adaptability and Flexibility = 0.861

Positive Influence and Encouragement = 0.984

The test–retest reliability coefficient of the Emotional Intelligence Scale was 0.978, while the split-half reliability coefficient was 0.957, confirming strong temporal stability and internal consistency of the instrument.

Construct validity analysis revealed strong positive correlations among the dimensions of Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Awareness and Understanding showed strong positive association with Emotional Regulation and Control, Emotional Resilience, and Interpersonal Relations. The intercorrelation matrix indicated that all dimensions were significantly related to the overall Emotional Intelligence construct.

The descriptive analysis showed that undergraduate students demonstrated moderate to high levels of Emotional Intelligence. Students from urban backgrounds demonstrated comparatively higher mean scores across most dimensions of Emotional Intelligence.

The independent samples t-test revealed significant differences between urban and rural undergraduate students in overall Emotional Intelligence. Urban students showed comparatively higher Emotional Intelligence scores than rural students. Significant differences were also observed in:

Emotional Awareness and Understanding

Emotional Regulation and Control

Interpersonal Relations and Empathy

Emotional Resilience and Motivation

Urban students demonstrated stronger emotional awareness, better emotional regulation, and improved interpersonal adaptability compared to rural students.

The findings indicate that educational exposure, digital accessibility, communication opportunities, and social interaction environments contribute significantly to emotional development among students.

The study also examined the influence of gender and daily social media usage hours on Emotional Intelligence. The statistical analysis indicated that gender differences were statistically insignificant across most Emotional Intelligence dimensions. Similarly, daily social media usage hours did not significantly influence Emotional Intelligence levels among undergraduate students.

The interaction effect analysis further revealed that residency type remained the strongest factor influencing Emotional Intelligence, whereas interaction effects involving gender and daily social media usage were statistically non-significant.

The findings support earlier research suggesting that environmental and educational conditions significantly contribute to emotional competencies among learners.

7. Major Findings

1. Undergraduate students demonstrated moderate to high levels of Emotional Intelligence.
2. Urban students showed significantly higher Emotional Intelligence compared to rural students.
3. Significant differences were observed in emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relations.
4. Environmental and educational exposure influenced emotional competencies among students.
5. Emotional Intelligence contributed positively to students' academic and interpersonal adjustment.

8. Conclusion

The study concludes that Emotional Intelligence is an important psychological factor influencing students' academic, emotional, and interpersonal functioning. Significant differences in Emotional Intelligence were observed between urban and rural undergraduate students, with urban students demonstrating comparatively higher emotional competencies.

The findings indicate that educational exposure, technological accessibility, communication opportunities, and environmental support systems contribute significantly to emotional development among students.

Educational institutions should therefore emphasize emotional intelligence development alongside academic instruction. Programs focusing on emotional awareness, stress management, interpersonal communication, empathy, and resilience may enhance students' overall educational adjustment and psychological well-being.

The study further highlights the need to reduce educational and infrastructural disparities between urban and rural institutions to ensure balanced emotional development opportunities for all students.

9. Educational Implications

1. Emotional Intelligence training programs should be integrated into higher education.
2. Teachers should encourage emotionally supportive classroom environments.
3. Counseling and guidance services should be strengthened in colleges.
4. Rural educational institutions require greater psychological and educational support.
5. Emotional skill development may improve academic adjustment and interpersonal relationships among students.

10. Limitations of the Study

1. The study was limited to undergraduate students affiliated with CSJMU, Kanpur.
2. The study employed a cross-sectional design.
3. Data were collected using self-report questionnaires.
4. The study primarily used quantitative methods.

11. Suggestions for Future Research

1. Future studies may use longitudinal research designs.
2. Comparative studies across states and universities may be conducted.
3. Qualitative methods may be used to understand emotional experiences in depth.
4. Future research may examine Emotional Intelligence in relation to stress, self-esteem, mental health, and academic achievement.

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