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*Case Study*

# Emotional Intelligence of Undergraduate Students: A Gender and Location-Based Comparison

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**Abstract:** The present study examined the emotional intelligence among undergraduate students by comparing differences based on gender and location. The sample consisted of 200 students from the Lakhimpur district of Assam, and data were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Sushma Talesara (2021). To assess variation between groups, statistical analysis was carried out using the mean, standard deviation, and t-test. The results revealed no significant difference in emotional intelligence between male and female students, nor between those from urban and rural backgrounds. The findings suggest that emotional intelligence among undergraduate students remains consistent regardless of gender and location.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence; Undergraduate Students; Gender; Location

## 1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is widely regarded as a significant psychological construct within the educational domain (Meyers, 2009), especially in higher education, where it holds considerable importance [1]. Goleman (1995) noted that EI accounts for nearly 80% of an individual's success, underscoring its role as a major contributor to overall life accomplishments [2]. Emotional intelligence is instrumental in shaping a balanced personality, fostering emotional maturity appropriate to one's developmental stage, and improving one's capacity to handle stress and competitive demands [3]. According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), EI involves the ability to accurately perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others, as well as manage emotional responses in ways that enhance overall well-being [4]. Similarly, Bar-On (2003) defines EI as a collection of competencies that enable individuals to deal effectively with everyday challenges and strengthen personal and social adjustment [5]. Birknerova (2011) further associates EI with various personal traits, including temperament, creativity, perception, and physical characteristics [6].

Bradberry et al. (2009) describe emotional intelligence as the capability to recognize, interpret, and manage one's own emotions during social interactions [7]. Mayer and Salovey (1997) also emphasise that EI includes the use of emotions, either by generating or evaluating them, to deepen self-understanding and relational insight, which promotes cognitive and emotional development [4]. Goleman (1995) portrays EI as an innate capacity to perceive, control, and express emotions constructively while demonstrating empathy and sensitivity toward others [2]. Bar-On (1997) views it as a set of non-cognitive skills that shape how individuals respond to external pressures [8]. Elias (1993) highlights that emotions influence behaviors that protect, support, and help individuals adapt in pursuit of their goals [9]. Weisinger (1998) define EI as the effective application of emotions to guide thought and

behaviour [10]. Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000) argue that emotions enrich human communication and strengthen interpersonal relationships [11], while Schutte (2000) notes that emotional competence is foundational to social development and stronger interpersonal bonds [12].

The theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence (EI) can be traced to early psychological frameworks that emphasised human adaptability, emotional functioning, and interpersonal understanding. The earliest conceptual roots are found in Thorndike's (1920) theory of social intelligence, which highlighted the importance of understanding and managing human relationships as a key aspect of functioning effectively in society [13]. Long before this, Charles Darwin recognised the adaptive importance of emotions, asserting that emotional expressions evolved to support survival behaviours and were often spontaneous, and involuntary responses to environmental stimuli. Although early definitions of intelligence focused predominantly on cognitive skills such as reasoning, memory, and problem-solving, researchers gradually acknowledged the role of emotional and social factors in overall human competence. Wechsler (1976) defined intelligence as the capacity to act purposefully, think rationally, and interact effectively with the environment, while earlier, Wechsler (1944) distinguished between intellectual and non-intellectual components of intelligence, giving formal recognition to emotional and behavioural elements in human functioning [14]. The concept of social intelligence continued to develop but gained renewed momentum when Gardner introduced the theory of Multiple Intelligences in 1983. Gardner argued that interpersonal intelligence involves understanding others' emotions, motivations, and intentions, whereas intrapersonal intelligence involves understanding one's own emotional processes and using that insight to guide decisions and behaviour (Fatt & Howe, 2003) [15]. These evolving perspectives set the stage for the formal introduction of emotional intelligence by Salovey and Mayer in 1990, marking a shift toward empirical analysis and theoretical refinement, which later expanded significantly following Goleman's influential publication in 1995 [16]. Since then, emotional intelligence has grown into an important construct in psychology, education, organisational research, and applied behavioural sciences.

Modern perspectives on emotional intelligence are commonly understood through three key theoretical frameworks: the Ability Model, the Mixed Model, and the Trait Model. Among these, Goleman's Mixed Model (1995, 1998, 2001) is highly influential and conceptualizes emotional intelligence as a set of learnable competencies rather than innate abilities [17-19]. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence consists of five major components. The first is **self-awareness**, which refers to the ability to recognise one's emotions and understand their effects, enabling accurate self-evaluation and confidence. The second component, **self-regulation**, involves managing impulses and emotions in a constructive manner and responding thoughtfully rather than reactively. The third, **self-motivation**, is defined as the pursuit of goals driven by intrinsic interest and persistence, while demonstrating resilience and optimism in the face of challenges. The fourth, **empathy**, emphasises understanding others' emotions and perspectives, allowing individuals to respond sensitively and maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships. Finally, **social skills** reflect the capacity to build networks, communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and work collaboratively. Together, these elements describe emotional intelligence as an essential psychological framework that supports personal growth, interpersonal functioning, and effective leadership across various contexts [17].

Gender and location are significant socio-demographic variables that may influence students' emotional development. Gender reflects socially constructed roles and expectations that shape how individuals express, regulate, and understand emotions, potentially leading to variations in Emotional Intelligence between male and female students. Location, specifically the urban–rural context, also contributes to emotional development through differing social environments. Urban students are often exposed to diverse interactions and broader educational opportunities, whereas rural students experience more community-centred settings. Together, gender and location provide meaningful frameworks for examining variations in Emotional Intelligence.

### *1.1. Review of Related Literature*

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become a central construct in educational psychology due to its documented relationship with academic success, emotional regulation, and interpersonal functioning. However, research examining EI across demographic variables, particularly gender and location, remains theoretically fragmented and methodologically inconsistent. For example, Garner, Carvalho, and Spears (2025) found that EI dimensions such as stress management and general mood significantly predicted academic performance, indicating that EI may support cognitive efficiency and academic persistence rather than functioning solely as a socio-emotional trait [20]. In contrast, Das et al. (2025) demonstrated a negative association between EI and internet addiction, suggesting that EI may operate as a protective factor in behavioural regulation; however, this study also reported gender differences, with females scoring higher in EI [21].

Findings on gender-based variability in EI remain contradictory. Studies such as Farheen et al. (2025) report higher EI among males [22], whereas Ratnaparkhe and Dongare (2025) and Jan et al. (2025) found females outperforming males in emotional regulation and empathy [23-24]. These discrepancies may stem from contextual factors such as cultural expectations, disciplinary environments (science vs. humanities), and shifting gender socialisation patterns. Additionally, Kumar et al. (2025) suggested that men tend to excel in emotional control, whereas women demonstrate greater emotional awareness and empathy, indicating that EI may manifest differently rather than exist at uniformly, higher or lower levels across genders [25].

Research concerning location-based differences is limited, particularly in the Indian context. Existing studies rarely examine how rural and urban disparities in educational resources, exposure, and socialisation opportunities may shape EI development. Therefore, a context-specific and multidimensional analysis, especially within under-researched regions such as Assam is needed to better understand how gender and location jointly influence emotional intelligence among undergraduate students.

### *1.2. Significance of the Study*

College students face increasing academic and psychosocial burdens, including transition from high school, examination pressure, career uncertainty, and financial constraints. Research finds that well over one-in-three undergraduates experience anxiety in higher education settings (Tan, 2023) and that elevated test anxiety is associated with poor performance and an increased risk of delayed study or dropout [26-27]. As late adolescence and early adulthood remain crucial for the development of emotional competencies, selecting

college student samples is justified interventions at this stage can promote adaptive emotional regulation and resilience. In the domain of emotional intelligence (EI), numerous studies indicate gender differences; females frequently outperform males in overall EI and in recognising others' emotions, though findings remain inconsistent [28-29]. Further, urban-rural residence appears to moderate EI; some research finds rural students exhibit higher EI than urban counterparts [30]. By examining EI among undergraduates with respect to gender and residential background, this study addresses gaps in existing literature and yields findings of practical significance for institutions designing student-support, curricula and psycho-educational programmes.

### *1.3. Objectives of the Study*

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To study the significant difference in Emotional Intelligence among undergraduate students based on gender.

2. To study the significant difference in Emotional Intelligence among undergraduate students based on location.

### *1.4. Hypotheses of the Study*

The researcher has proposed the following hypotheses:

$H_o$*-1*: There is no significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between male and female undergraduate students.

$H_o$*-2*: There is no significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between male and female undergraduate students in terms of self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, social skills, and empathy.

$H_o$*- 3*: There is no significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between urban and rural undergraduate students.

$H_o$*-4*: There is no significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between urban and rural undergraduate students in terms of self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, social skills, and empathy.

## 2. Methodology

Based on the topic and objectives of the present study, the researcher has adopted the descriptive research method for collecting data and necessary investigation.

### *2.1. Population and Sample of the Study*

The population of the study consisted of all 5th-semester undergraduate students enrolled in government colleges of Lakhimpur District, Assam. According to official records, the district has seventeen government colleges, of which five were purposively selected as sample institutions [31]. From these colleges, a total of 200 students were chosen, comprising equal numbers of male (100) and female (100) participants. The sample also maintained proportional representation from urban (50 male, 50 female) and rural (50 male, 50 female)

backgrounds. A stratified cum simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate inclusion of all relevant subgroups within the population.

### *2.2. Description of the Tool*

In the present study, data were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Sushma Talesara (2021). The scale consists of 46 items, including 30 positive and 16 negative statements, and measures emotional intelligence across five key dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, social skills, and empathy.

### *2.3. Procedure of Data Collection*

Data collection was carried out by visiting the selected colleges in the Lakhimpur district after securing formal permission from the principals. Stratified random sampling was used to categorise students by gender (male, female) and location (urban, rural), followed by simple random sampling within each stratum using the lottery method. After selecting the sample, the researcher met the students at scheduled times, established rapport, and explained the purpose of the study, assuring them of confidentiality. Questionnaires were distributed with clear instructions, and the researcher remained present to clarify doubts and ensure proper completion. No time limit was imposed, and all responses were checked for completeness before collection.

### *2.4. Statistical Techniques Used*

In the present study, the data were analysed descriptively using measures such as mean, median, and standard deviation. To determine whether a significant difference existed between the two variables, the researcher employed the t-test.

## 3. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

**Hypothesis-1:** There is no significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between male and female undergraduate students.

**Table 1**. Emotional Intelligence of Male and Female Undergraduate Students

| Variables | Sub group | N | Mean | SD | df | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Emotional Intelligence** | Male | 100 | 117.13 | 8.71 | 198 | 0.145 |
| | Female | 100 | 115.37 | 8.32 | | |

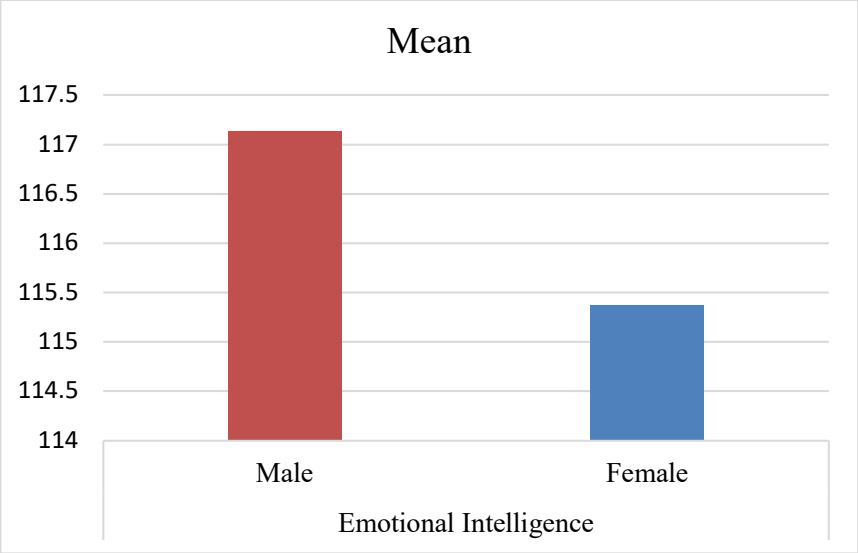


**Figure 1.** Bar graph showing the emotional intelligence of male and female undergraduate students

Table 1 shows the comparison scores, while Figure 1 illustrates a bar graph depicting the emotional intelligence levels of male and female undergraduate students. Male students (N = 100) recorded a mean score of 117.13 (SD = 8.71), while female students (N = 100) obtained a slightly lower mean score of 115.37 (SD = 8.32). An independent sample t-test was conducted to assess whether this difference was statistically significant. The resulting t-value of 0.145 (df = 198) indicates that the observed difference is not significant. These findings demonstrate that emotional intelligence does not vary meaningfully between male and female undergraduate students. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is no significant gender-based difference in emotional intelligence is supported.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between male and female undergraduate students in terms of self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, social skills, and empathy.

**Table 2.** Emotional Intelligence of Male and Female Undergraduate Students Based on Dimension

| S. No | Dimension of EI | Variable | N | Mean | S. D | df | 't' value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(i)** | Self-awareness | Male | 100 | 30.96 | 3.59 | 190 | 0.180 |
| | | Female | 100 | 30.19 | 4.45 | | |
| **(ii)** | Self-Management | Male | 100 | 27.38 | 3.8 | 198 | 0.984 |
| | | Female | 100 | 27.37 | 3.6 | | |
| **(iii)** | Self-Motivation | Male | 100 | 19.01 | 3.30 | 197 | 0.612 |
| | | Female | 100 | 18.87 | 3.10 | | |
| **(iv)** | Social Skill | Male | 100 | 18.08 | 2.48 | 198 | 0.910 |
| | | Female | 100 | 18.04 | 2.52 | | |
| **(v)** | Empathy | Male | 100 | 23.43 | 2.04 | 196 | 0.053 |
| | | Female | 100 | 22.64 | 2.27 | | |

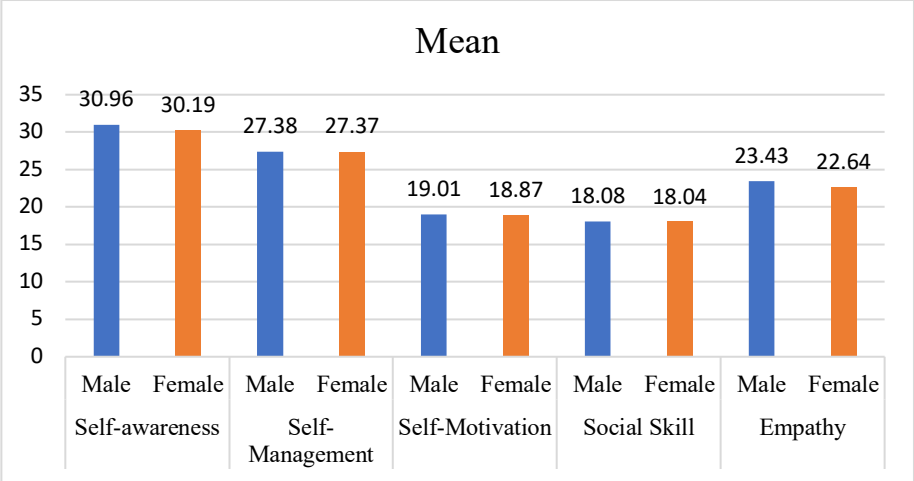


**Figure 2**. Bar graph showing the emotional intelligence of male and female undergraduate students based on dimension

Table 2 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of male and female undergraduate students across the five dimensions of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, social skills, and empathy while Figure 2 shows a bar graph illustrating the emotional intelligence of male and female undergraduate students based on these dimensions. The results show that gender-based differences are minimal, with none reaching statistical significance. In self-awareness, males (M = 30.96, SD = 3.59) and females (M = 30.19, SD = 4.45) scored almost equally (t = 0.180). A similar trend appears in self-management, where males (M = 27.38, SD = 3.80) and females (M = 27.37, SD = 3.60) recorded nearly identical means (t = 0.984). Self-motivation scores were also comparable, with males (M = 19.01, SD = 3.30) and females (M = 18.87, SD = 3.10) showing minimal variation (t = 0.612). Social skills followed the same pattern, as males (M = 18.08, SD = 2.48) and females (M = 18.04, SD = 2.52) reported similar levels (t = 0.910). Although males scored slightly higher in empathy (M = 23.43, SD = 2.04) than females (M = 22.64, SD = 2.27), the t-value (0.053) confirmed that there was no significant difference. Overall, the findings support the hypothesis that emotional intelligence does not vary significantly by gender.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between urban and rural undergraduate students.

**Table 3.** Emotional Intelligence of urban and rural undergraduate students

| Variables | Sub group | N | Mean | SD | df | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Emotional Intelligence** | Urban | 100 | 115.93 | 8.11 | 196 | 0.597 |
| | Rural | 100 | 116.57 | 8.99 | | |

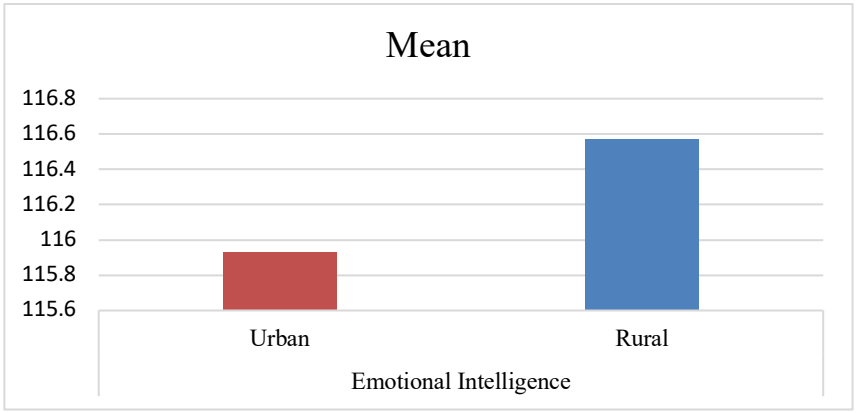


**Figure 3.** Bar graph showing the emotional intelligence of urban and rural undergraduate students

Table 3 presents the emotional intelligence scores of undergraduate students based on their geographical location (urban vs. rural), while Figure 3 shows a bar graph illustrating the emotional intelligence of urban and rural undergraduate students. The urban group (N = 100) obtained a mean score of 115.93 (SD = 8.11), while the rural group (N = 100) recorded a slightly higher mean score of 116.57 (SD = 8.99). To determine whether this difference was statistically meaningful, an independent samples t-test was performed. The resulting t-value of 0.597 (df = 196) indicates that the difference between the two groups is not statistically significant. These findings suggest that emotional intelligence levels among undergraduate students do not differ significantly based on location, indicating comparable EI development among both urban and rural students.

**Hypothesis 4:** There is no significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between urban and rural undergraduate students in terms of self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, social skills, and empathy.

**Table 4.** Emotional Intelligence of urban and rural undergraduate students based on dimension

| S. No | Dimension of EI | Variable | N | Mean | S. D | df | 't' value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(i)** | Self-awareness | Urban | 100 | 30.8 | 3.88 | 197 | 0.434 |
| | | Rural | 100 | 30.35 | 4.23 | | |
| **(ii)** | Self-Management | Urban | 100 | 27.25 | 3.64 | 197 | 0.637 |
| | | Rural | 100 | 27.5 | 3.84 | | |
| **(iii)** | Self-Motivation | Urban | 100 | 19.17 | 3.21 | 198 | 0.415 |
| | | Rural | 100 | 18.8 | 3.18 | | |
| **(iv)** | Social Skill | Urban | 100 | 18.4 | 2.53 | 198 | 0.054 |
| | | Rural | 100 | 17.72 | 2.42 | | |
| **(v)** | Empathy | Urban | 100 | 23.15 | 2.29 | 196 | 0.459 |
| | | Rural | 100 | 22.92 | 2.08 | | |

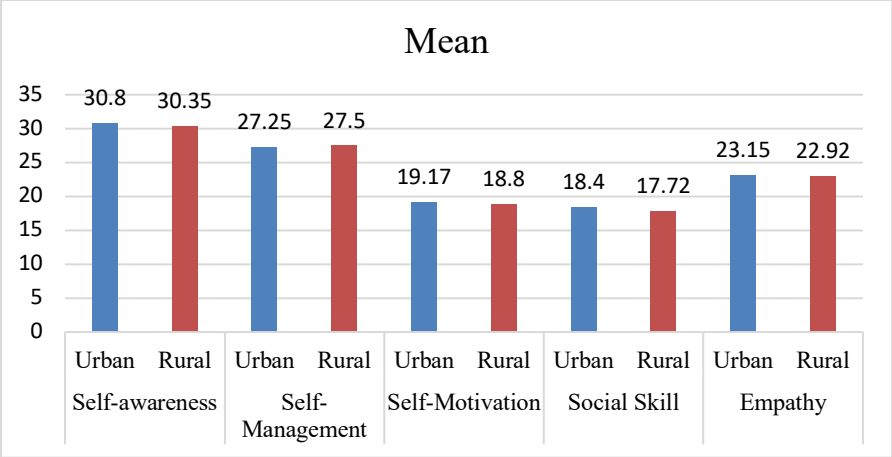


**Figure 4.** Bar graph showing the emotional Intelligence of urban and rural undergraduate students based on dimension

Table 4 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of urban and rural undergraduate students across the five dimensions of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, social skills, and empathy while Figure 4 shows a bar graph illustrating the emotional intelligence of urban and rural undergraduate students based on these dimensions. The results show only slight variations between the two groups, with none reaching statistical significance. In self-awareness, urban students (M = 30.8, SD = 3.88) and rural students (M = 30.35, SD = 4.23) performed similarly (t = 0.434). A comparable pattern was observed in self-management, where urban (M = 27.25, SD = 3.64) and rural students (M = 27.5, SD = 3.84) obtained nearly identical scores (t = 0.637). Self-motivation also showed minimal variation, with urban students (M = 19.17, SD = 3.21) slightly outperforming rural students (M = 18.8, SD = 3.18), though not significantly (t = 0.415). In social skills, urban students (M = 18.4, SD = 2.53) scored marginally higher than rural students (M = 17.72, SD = 2.42), but the difference remained non-significant (t = 0.054). Empathy scores were similarly close for urban (M = 23.15, SD = 2.29) and rural students (M = 22.92, SD = 2.08) (t = 0.459). Overall, the findings support the conclusion that emotional intelligence does not significantly differ by location.

### *3.1. Findings of the Study*

The findings of the study reveal that no statistically significant differences were observed between male and female participants. Likewise, no meaningful variation in EI was found based on students' residential backgrounds, whether urban or rural. These outcomes align with Goleman's Five-Dimensional Model of Emotional Intelligence, which views EI as a set of adaptable competencies shaped primarily through learning, experience, and self-regulation rather than fixed demographic traits [17, 18]. From this perspective, the similarity in emotional competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, motivation, social skills, and self-management across groups may be attributed to shared academic environments, comparable social exposure, and access to similar developmental opportunities offered in contemporary educational settings [18]. Additionally, the lack of difference between urban and rural students is consistent with the notion that emotional intelligence evolves through contextual and experiential learning rather than geographical upbringing, especially in today's context where technology, curriculum standardisation, and broader social influences create more uniform learning experiences [17]. Overall, the results reinforce the understanding that emotional

intelligence is a learned and trainable construct rather than one determined by gender or location, supporting the theoretical principles proposed by Goleman.

## 4. Conclusions

The present study investigated whether Emotional Intelligence (EI) differs among undergraduate students based on gender and residential location, and the findings revealed no significant variation in overall EI or its dimensions self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, social skills, and empathy across these groups. This suggests that emotional intelligence remains relatively consistent among students regardless of demographic factors, indicating that shared academic environments, similar learning opportunities, and common social experiences may play a more influential role in shaping EI than gender or geographical background. These results align with theoretical frameworks such as Goleman's model, which conceptualizes EI as a set of competencies developed through learning and experience rather than predetermined characteristics. The implications of the findings highlight that all students possess a similar capacity to strengthen their emotional intelligence, allowing institutions to design EI enhancement programmes for the broader student population rather than targeting specific demographic groups. However, the absence of differences in this study does not imply universal irrelevance of gender or location; rather, it reflects the characteristics of the sample and context examined. Therefore, future research should explore additional factors such as personality traits, family dynamics, cultural influences, socio-emotional experiences, and academic pressures to further understand potential variability in emotional intelligence among undergraduates.

## Multidisciplinary Domains

This study examines the following areas: (a) sociology, (b) psychology, and (c) education.

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## Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest are disclosed by the authors.

## Declaration on AI Usage

The authors affirm that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation of the work.

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