

## **Influence of Personality Factors on the Trait Emotional Intelligence among College Students**

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**Abstract:** Personality factors play a dominant role in determining human behaviour. Emotional intelligence (EI) reflects the ability of individuals in handling the day to day challenges in environment and predicting success in life, including professional and personal pursuits. Personality factors lay a foundation for functional framework in which emotional regulation and utilization could take place. This study was conducted to analyze the influence of personality factors on EI. A sample of 136 students (64 from 1<sup>st</sup> year and 72 from 3<sup>rd</sup> year of UG course) from two colleges in Salem city was selected through simple random sampling and data was collected with the help of Emotional Quotient Inventory by Bar-On and Big Five Personality Locator by McCrae and Costa. Results revealed that students significantly differ in their extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness factors on the basis of their gender where as in extraversion and neuroticism on the basis of their year of study. Also, there was a significant difference in the EI of students based on their year of study. Regression analysis showed that emotional stability and openness to experience significantly contributed to the emotional intelligence among college students. The results and implications of the study are discussed in this article.

**Key words:** *Big Five Personality Factors, Emotional Intelligence, College Students*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Education as a man-making process, strives to ignite young minds with knowledge and skills. At college level, students are molded to take up a career and suit to the requirements of society. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000) defined EI as “an important trait, ability and acquired skill within the personality that is concerned with processing of emotions” through which people can face the challenges of life.

#### **Personality**

Ellis, Abrams and Abrams (2009) viewed personality as “behaviors, styles of thought, speech, perception, and interpersonal interactions which are viewed as consistent characteristics of an individual”. In their opinion, “psychologists have explored how and why individuals differ and tried to predict human behavior. Early personality psychologists had contended that personality was developed during early childhood experiences and remained relatively stable across lifespan, while the situationalists believed that personality as an outcome of various situations and social surrounds which can be learned, unlearned and relearned. It was the observable result of reinforcement”. Studies showed a mixed result regarding the development of personality. While many suspected that people's personalities were fixed in childhood, research by Kersting (2003) suggested that “most people's personalities evolved throughout their lives”. Big Five Personality Factor Model by McCrae and Costa (1987) grouped personality into a continuum of five domains, viz. “openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism”. Srivastava et al (2003) found that “conscientiousness increased through ages with most change occurring in a person's 20s, agreeableness during 30s and continued to improve through 60s”. However, it is agreed by researchers that personality is relatively stable trait that governs human behavior.

#### **Emotional Intelligence (EI)**

Emotional Intelligence is a trait that facilitates appropriate expression of human behavior. According to Petrides and Furnham (2001) “*Trait EI* included elements from social intelligence (Thorndike, 1920) and dispositions from personality domain such as empathy (Goleman, 1995). It encompassed behavioral dispositions and self-perceived abilities representing ‘an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies and skills that influenced one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures’; whereas *ability EI* assessed information-processing ability in the domain of cognition, labeled as cognitive-emotional ability”. Zeidner, Matthews, Robert and MacCann (2003) considered “EI as a package of acquired skills for insightful self-regulation, associated with conscious awareness of strategies for emotional adaptation”. Saarni (1999)

opined that “social experience was critical for obtaining this kind of self-awareness”. This view was compatible with ability model EI. Development of meta-cognitive abilities may be critical for acquisition of this kind of more advanced emotion-regulation skills. Children acquired an understanding of how emotions affect thoughts only in the school-age years. Flavell, Flavell and Green (2001) found that “5-year-olds performed very poorly, 8-year-olds performed reasonably well, and adults performed near-perfectly on a task measuring awareness of the links between mental and emotional states”. Jaeger (2003) indicated that “EI can be improved through instructions in classroom setting at graduate level”.

## II. NEED FOR THE STUDY

Emotional intelligence facilitates awareness of one’s own emotions and ability to handle it. Personality factors lay the foundation on which emotional regulation and utilization takes place. There are different programs included in the curriculum aimed at developing EI and personality among college students. However, these programs are generic in nature. A study on predictive role of personality factors on the emotional intelligence would be helpful in mapping how development of a specific personality factor lead to enhancement of specific emotional skill. College days are crucial in students’ life because their success in career as well as life depends on the development of skills in this stage. The emotional skills are the foundation which could be reflected in the day to day activities in turn predicts success in life. Hence, it is imperative to examine the predictive role of personality factors on the EI of college students.

## III. RESEARCH METHOD

The present study adopted survey method. NEO-Big five personality locator by McCrae and Costa (1992) and Emotional Quotient Inventory by Bar-On (1997) were used to collect the data. These tools are highly valid. They were revalidated in Tamil Nadu context by the Department of Psychology, Periyar University and found to have significant reliability and validity coefficients. The population of the study consisted of college students in Salem city. 150 college students from Salem city were selected through simple random sampling. The above mentioned tools were distributed to the students. Out of the 150 data collected, only 136 were considered for final analysis.

### *Hypotheses*

1. Personality factors have significant influence on emotional intelligence among college students.
2. Male and female students differ significantly in their personality factors.
3. Students differ significantly in their personality factors on the basis of year of study.
4. First and third year college students differ significantly in their emotional intelligence.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: Predictive role of Personality on Emotional Intelligence: Regression Analysis**

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	□	“t”-values	Model Summary
Extraversion	Emotional Intelligence	-0.978	1.84 <sup>NS</sup>	R=0.663 R <sup>2</sup> =0.440 F=20.43*
Agreeableness		1.937	3.93*	
Conscientiousness		-0.183	0.33 <sup>NS</sup>	
Emotional Stability		2.954	7.21*	
Openness to experience		2.659	4.84*	

\*Significant at p<0.05; <sup>NS</sup>-Not significant

Linear Regression analysis was carried out with personality factor as predictor variable and EI as dependent variable. Personality factors significantly predict EI with R<sup>2</sup> value 0.44 indicating 44% variance in dependent variable. Personality Factors agreeableness, emotional stability and openness to experience add statistically significant to the prediction of emotional intelligence among college students. Hence, the hypothesis-1 is accepted. The present finding is supported by Petrides et al. (2010) indicated that neuroticism was the strongest factor predicting EI which is followed by agreeableness and openness to experience.

It is observed from table 2 that male and female college students differ significantly in the dimensions of extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Hence the hypothesis-2 is accepted. From the table, it is noticed that the male students have displayed higher extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness.

**Table 2: Personality Factors of College Students: Gender Wise Comparison**

Big Five Personality Factors	Male (N=48)		Female (N=88)		't' value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Extraversion	16.08	2.65	13.14	2.88	5.99*
Agreeableness	15.42	2.23	13.14	2.71	5.25*
Conscientiousness	16.08	2.90	13.41	3.13	4.99*
Emotional Stability	15.92	3.07	15.00	3.25	1.62 <sup>NS</sup>
Openness to experience	15.25	2.95	15.91	2.65	1.28 <sup>NS</sup>

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; <sup>NS</sup>-Not significant

From the evolutionary perspective, it is expected that female should have higher agreeableness, and it is very common in the Indian society. But, the present finding is contradictory to the views of Costa, Terracciano and McCrae (2001). Today, due to the wider education opportunity and exposure women have started to compete with men in all areas of life. Also it is witnessed from the educational opportunities in Indian that women represent major share and achieve gold medals in the university examinations. Probably these kinds of exposure may instigate women not to agree with everything imposed on them. This could also be the reason for the higher tendency of females in their openness to experiences. This finding is in tune with findings of Rahmani and Lavasani (2012).

**Table 3: Personality Factors of College Students with respect to their Year of Study**

Big Five Personality Factors	First Year (N=64)		Third Year (N=72)		't' value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Extraversion	15.00	2.76	13.44	3.27	2.97*
Agreeableness	14.13	2.71	13.78	2.83	0.72 <sup>NS</sup>
Conscientiousness	14.63	2.49	14.11	3.88	0.90 <sup>NS</sup>
Emotional Stability	15.44	3.34	14.00	2.94	2.66*
Openness to experience	15.44	2.51	15.89	2.89	0.94 <sup>NS</sup>

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; <sup>NS</sup>-Not significant

From the table 3, it is noticed that first year and third year college students differ significantly in the dimensions of extraversion and neuroticism. Hence, hypothesis-3 is partly accepted. First year students had higher scores in the dimensions of extraversion and neuroticism than the third year students. In the dimensions of agreeableness and conscientiousness, they do not differ significantly. Earlier studies had showed that agreeableness and conscientiousness tend to increase after the age of 30. Earlier, the social roles and career were relatively stable. The process of globalization would have created competitive environment which compel people to disagree with the traditions and practices in turn lead to focus people on the day to day demands.

**Table 4: Emotional Intelligence of College Students with respect to their Year of Study**

Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence	First Year (N=64)		Third Year (N=72)		't' value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Self Regard	19.13	3.30	22.83	4.78	5.30*
Interpersonal Relation	16.38	4.03	17.61	4.09	1.77 <sup>NS</sup>
Impulse Control	8.75	2.60	11.06	3.33	4.51*
Problem Solving	13.44	3.73	16.06	3.87	4.00*
Emotional Self Awareness	11.31	2.82	12.22	2.50	1.97 <sup>NS</sup>
Flexibility	14.94	2.45	15.44	4.80	0.78 <sup>NS</sup>
Reality Testing	10.75	3.25	11.94	1.79	2.00*
Stress Tolerance	17.75	1.79	18.94	3.97	2.29*
Assertiveness	12.19	2.23	11.61	3.81	1.08 <sup>NS</sup>
Empathy	11.13	3.18	13.33	4.02	3.56*
EI Total	135.75	11.10	151.06	22.15	5.17*

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; <sup>NS</sup>-Not significant

Table 4 shows the differences in the emotional intelligence of first and third year college students. Third year students were found to have significantly higher values in the dimensions of self-regard, impulse control, problem solving, reality testing, stress tolerance, empathy and overall EI. Hence, hypothesis-4 is

accepted. This result is similar to the findings of Goleman (1996) stated that “emotional intelligence increased with age and it can be learned, cultivated and increased in adulthood”. Boyatzis (2000) in his longitudinal study showed that “people can change their EI competencies over two to five years”. Wong and Law (2002) working with different group of samples have found that, “age is positively correlated with emotional intelligence across different job situations”. Srivastava and Bharamanaikar (2004) have also concluded that “EI had increased with age”. From these studies we could understand that EI could be enhanced with the increase in age.

## V. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study highlighted the need for understanding personality and emotional intelligence in a broader perspective. Age and gender of the students have to be taken into consideration while conducting training programmes for personality development and emotional intelligence. College days are the crucial period where we can shape the lives of students. Targeting the cultivation of distinct dimensions of emotional intelligence in relation to the personality factors would be effective in inculcating job fetching qualities. When finding the right man for the right job is a mantra of management, shaping the man right remains the task of training and development. Hence, it is suggested from this study that curriculum planners should focus on developing emotion-related facets of personality development courses.

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