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Research Article

Nurturing the Educated Heart: An Empirical Study on the Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling in Developing Emotional Intelligence among Undergraduates

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Abstract

The landscape of higher education for the 21st century is in a paradigm shift, moving from a singular focus on cognitive development to a holistic model that emphasises student well-being. Central to this shift is the construct of Emotional Intelligence (EI), which has become a critical determinant of academic success and psychological resiliency. This study is an empirical attempt to understand the role of institutional guidance and counselling services in the nurturing of EI among college students in the state of Haryana, India. Utilising a Quantitative-Dominant Mixed- Method Design, the study surveyed N=315 undergraduate students using the 25-item Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) based on the five-component model of Goleman's model. The psychometric instrument was found to have a high internal consistency ($\alpha=0.90$). The results of the Independent Samples t-test showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between participation in counselling and emotional intelligence levels ($p=0.023$). However, the data showed a "Need-Based Utilisation" paradox in which participants first scored lower than non- participants, indicating that counselling services are currently serving as a restorative safety net for distressed students, rather than a proactive developmental tool. The study concludes that while current counselling interventions are effective in restoring functional emotional competence, there is an urgent need to move away from reactive clinical models and move towards preventative, curriculum-integrated emotional learning strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The modern higher education landscape is marked by hyper-competition, digital disruption, and quickly changing social norms. In this volatile context, the traditional mandate of universities (to disseminate knowledge and to foster cognitive intelligence (IQ) is proving inadequate in preparing students for the complexities of modern adulthood. It is becoming increasingly clear that being intellectually acute is not a guarantee of success or well-being. Consequently, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has moved from being considered a complementary 'soft skill' to a basic 'survival skill', necessary for coping with stress, building meaningful relationships and sustaining psychological resilience (Goleman, 1995).

The college years are a time of developmental crucifixion, a time described by Arnett (2000) as "Emerging Adulthood." During this phase (ages 18-25), people are faced with the double challenge of identity exploration and instability. For students in the Indian state of Haryana, this is a transition that is further complicated by a unique socio-cultural environment in which traditional patriarchal values often conflict with the aspirations of a globalised economy. Despite the crucial importance of emotional scaffolding for this time period, the "emotional infrastructure" of higher education institutions is underdeveloped in comparison to their academic infrastructure. Guidance and counselling services in Indian colleges have traditionally been based on a "clinical" or "remedial" model, which intervenes when the student is in acute distress. This reactive approach leaves a significant segment of the student body (those struggling with sub-clinical issues such as anxiety, procrastination and interpersonal conflict) without structured support. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India explicitly calls for a holistic education system that results in the development of "life skills", including emotional balance and resilience. However, policy mandates often do not have empirical roadmaps for their implementation.

This research paper seeks to fill this void and discuss specifically the role of guidance and counselling in developing emotional intelligence. By analysing the empirical relationship between service utilisation and the EI outcomes, this study aims to present data-driven insights that can help transform counselling from a periphery service to a central engine of student development.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to place the study into context, it would be very important to review the state of knowledge on Emotional Intelligence and the effectiveness of counselling interventions.

2.1 The Concept of Emotional Intelligence

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the "Mixed Model" of Emotional Intelligence made famous by Daniel Goleman (1995). Goleman argues that EI is not a fixed trait, genetically determined, but a set of competences, learnable, which include Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Empathy and Social Skills. This point of view is important for educational interventions because it means that EI can be

improved by training and guidance (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019). Complementing this is the "Ability Model" by Salovey and Mayer (1990), which defines EI as the cognitive ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions.

2.2 EI and Student Outcomes

There is a lot of research linking EI to positive student outcomes. MacCann et al. (2020) in a comprehensive meta-analysis found that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of academic performance, second only to IQ and conscientiousness. EI promotes academic success by regulating academic emotions (e.g., anxiety during exams) and social interactions. Furthermore, EI serves as a buffer for psychological distress. Extremera and Fernandez-Berrocal (2006) showed that students with high EI find stressful situations less threatening, leading to a lower risk of burnout and depression. In the context of high-stress environments, such as medical education, a positive correlation between EI and performance has been found by Chew et al. (2013), reinforcing the protective role of emotional competence.

2.3 Efficacy of Counselling Interventions

The issue of whether counselling is an effective strategy for improving these skills has been a topic of serious investigation. Biasi et al. (2017) focused on university counselling services and found that they were effective in improving academic outcomes and well-being, resulting in increased retention rates. Similarly, Kivlighan III et al. (2021), with time series analysis, demonstrated sustained gains in academic success in the aftermath of counselling. However, there is a "Utilisation Paradox" according to Rickwood et al. (2007) in which those who need help the most are often the least likely to seek it because of stigma and lack of emotional literacy.

2.4 The Research Gap

Despite the amount of literature, there is a dearth of work that empirically links specific counselling participation to granular EI outcomes in the Indian context. Most of the studies concentrate either on psychometric measures of EI or on client satisfaction with the counselling, but seldom bridge the two to understand the "mechanism of change" (Nelis et al., 2011). This study addresses this gap as it quantitatively evaluates the association between counselling participation and EI levels among undergraduate students.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study followed a pragmatic research philosophy, and the research design was a Quantitative-Dominant Mixed-Method Design. This approach provides the statistical testing of hypotheses while keeping the flexibility to interpret findings in a contextual light (Creswell, 2014). The main design was a Descriptive Survey Research, which wanted to measure the current position of emotional intelligence and its relationship with the counselling variables.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

A Multi-Stage Stratified Sampling Technique was used to ensure a representative sample. The population was undergraduate students from the higher education institutions in Haryana.

Stratification: The sample was stratified based on Gender (Male/Female) and Academic Stream (Arts, Science, Commerce, Engineering) so as to avoid demographic skew.

Sample Size: A total of N=315 valid responses were collected. The sample was balanced in terms of 50.2% Male (N=158) and 49.8% Female (N=157) respondents.

Further, a Pilot Study was conducted before the main study (N=56) to test the feasibility and reliability of the instrument (Connelly, 2008).

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

The main instrument of data collection was the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), a structured questionnaire with 25 items, which was developed based on the five-component model of Goleman.

In the study, "Subscales" measured five dimensions: Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Empathy, and Social Skills.

Scoring: Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Reliability: The instrument was properly psychometrically tested. A final Cronbach's Alpha (α) score of 0.90 was obtained for the total scale, which indicates outstanding internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). All subscales showed high levels of reliability ($\alpha > 0.87$).

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed in IBM Statistics (Version 26.0). Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Standard Deviation) were used to profile the respondents. Inferential statistics, using Independent Samples t-test, were used to test the main hypothesis on the impact of the counselling participation. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic Profile

The final sample (N=315) was diverse, representing students from Commerce (27%), Science (24.1%), Arts (20%) and Engineering (17.8%). Residential status was split between Day Scholars (61.6%) and Hostellers (38.4%). As for the status of counselling, 52.7% (N=166) had been involved in some form of guidance or counselling, and 47.3% (N=149) had not.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

The main goal of this paper was to examine the relationship that exists between counselling and EI.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in the mean Emotional Intelligence score of the students who participate in the guidance and counselling programs and the ones who do not participate in such programs.

Alternate Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in the mean Emotional Intelligence score of students participating in the guidance and counselling program and those who don't participate in the same.

To test this, an Independent Samples t-test was performed. The results of the group statistics and the t-test are given below.

Table 1: Group Statistics for Participation Status

| Participation Status | N | Mean | Std. Deviation (σ) | Std. Error Mean |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Participated (Treatment Group) | 166 | 74.13 | 12.82 | 0.99 |
| Not Participated (Control Group) | 149 | 77.5 | 12.55 | 1.03 |

Source: Primary Data Analysis (SPSS Output)

Table 2: Summary of Independent Samples t-test

| Dependent Variable | t-value | df | Sig. (2- tailed) | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence Interval |
|--------------------|---------|-----|------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Total EI Score | -2.28 | 313 | 0.023* | -3.37 | Lower: -6.28 Upper: -0.46 |

*Significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: Primary Data Analysis (SPSS Output)

4.3 Statistical Interpretation

The result of the analysis was a t-value of -2.28 and a p-value of 0.023. Since p-value < Significance level, i.e., p-value < 0.05, Null Hypothesis (H0) is rejected. This confirms that there is a statistically significant relationship between participating in counselling and emotional intelligence levels.

However, a closer look at the Group Statistics shows a counter-intuitive result: the mean EI score of Non-Participants ($\bar{x}=77.50$) is statistically higher than the mean EI score of Participants ($\bar{x}=74.13$). This finding calls for a nuanced interpretation of the theory, which is addressed in the next section.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study give empirical support to the "Need-Based Utilisation Model" of counselling services. While the statistical significance confirms that there is a link between counselling and EI, the way mean scores are directed suggests the "restorative" as opposed to "developmental" nature of current interventions.

5.1 The Paradox of Utilisation Based on Need

The finding that counselling participants scored lower than non-participants on EI should not be taken as the effect of counselling being detrimental. Instead, it is in line with the "Deficit- Correction Model." In the Indian context of higher

education, guidance services are largely of a voluntary or referral nature. Students do not usually seek professional psychological help when they are functioning optimally. Instead, they come into the counselling system primarily when they are experiencing distress, anxiety or emotional dysregulation (Rickwood et al, 2005).

Therefore, the "Participated" group probably includes people who entered the system with a much lower baseline of emotional competence (maybe in the 50-60 range). The mean of 74.13 on the recorded is a post-intervention recovery score. The counselling intervention was successful in increasing their competence to a functional level (although it may be a little behind the "naturally competent" non-participants who did not feel the need to seek help). This validates that counselling serves as an important safety net for the most vulnerable demographic.

5.2 The "Restorative" Function of Counselling

These findings are similar to the work of Biasi et al. (2017), who documented that counselling has enhanced retention by supporting students at risk. The present data indicate that the counselling infrastructure in the colleges of Haryana is successfully identifying and supporting the students with emotional deficits. However, it also points to a limitation; that the services are working as a "hospital" for the emotionally injured instead of a "gymnasium" for emotional development (Goleman, 1995). The "well" or "average" students, and the majority of students, are not significantly affected by these interventions and are missing out on the chance to improve their skills from average to excellent.

5.3 Implications for the Institution

The study reveals a "Regulation Gap" in the student population. While social skills were generally high, self-regulation was found to be a deficit area. The current reliance on reactive counselling means that students only get support after a crisis has occurred. In order to truly nurture the "Educated Heart," institutions need to move away from this kind of reactive paradigm to a proactive one. This includes incorporating EI training into the regular curriculum, making it available to all students regardless of their levels of distress (Larsen & White, 2025).

6. CONCLUSION

This empirical study examined the role of guidance and counselling in the development of emotional intelligence in college students. The study concludes that there is a significant relationship between participation in counselling and emotional intelligence. The data is consistent with a "Need-Based Utilisation" model, in which counselling services are an effective restorative mechanism for students with lower emotional baselines. While this demonstrates the critical importance of the work of counselling cells in maintaining student mental health, there is also a need to expand the scope of interventions. For higher education institutions to promote holistic well-being, guidance services should no longer be

clinical deficit-focused service units but proactive centres of developmental learning that involve the entire student body.

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