



EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE AMONG MALE AND FEMALE ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

The present study attempted to investigate gender and age differences in emotional competence among adolescents. Emotional competence has been defined as the potentials of an individual to understand, express, and modulate emotions effectively that will enable him/her to function adaptively in personal and social contexts. In the framework elaborated by Coleman, 1970, five sub-components of emotional competence were identified, namely: Adequate Depth of Feeling (ADF), Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions (AEC), Ability to Function with Emotions (AFE), Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions (ACPE), and Encouragement of Positive Emotions (EPE). A sample of 153 adolescents in the age group of 15–19 years was selected from Kerala by using stratified random sampling. Data were collected by administering the Emotional Competency Scale developed by Dr. Harish Sharma and Dr. Rajeev Lochan Bharadwaj, 1995. Independent sample t-test analyses were carried out for examining gender and age differences in emotional competence and its sub-components.

The results showed that there was a significant difference in the overall emotional competence, with male adolescents scoring higher than females in total EC, ADF, AEC, and AFE. No significant differences were obtained for ACPE and EPE. In addition, no significant differences were obtained between the groups of adolescents aged 15–17 years and those aged 18–19 years on all the variables. These findings therefore indicate that gender influences emotional competence significantly, which could emanate from socialization, environmental, and rearing variables, while age variables within late adolescence seem to be minimal. This

study, therefore, emphasizes the development of emotional competence through specific educational and developmental programs that could lead to an improvement in the emotional well-being and social conduct of the adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, where an individual undergoes significant physical, psychological, and emotional changes. Though largely identified with the teenage years, adolescence can start as young as 10 years and last into the mid-twenties. According to the WHO, adolescents are those individuals between the ages of 10 and 19 years. In this stage, young people become capable of recognizing, expressing, and managing feelings; the combined process is called emotional competence (EC) (Denham, 2019).

The concept of emotional intelligence historically evolved from early research on social intelligence in the 1920s and 1930s. Salovey and Mayer (1990) initially conceptualized EI as a set of four abilities: perceiving, understanding, managing, and using emotions in oneself and others. Goleman (2001) later expanded this framework to encompass broader competencies within self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. However, the theoretical foundation of EI has been widely debated. Critics (e.g., Zeidner et al., 2002; Carroll, 1993) contend that EI lacks conceptual precision and shares substantial overlap with constructs such as social intelligence. Thereby, contemporary researchers have increasingly focused on emotional competence by emphasizing learned, context-dependent emotional skills rather than innate personality traits.

As Saarni (1999, 2011) explains, emotional competence is comprised of the socially and developmentally acquired ability to respond adaptively in emotion-eliciting situations. In contrast to EI, with its emphasis on internal attributes, EC emphasizes skill development as shaped within social, cultural, and interpersonal contexts. Saarni identified eight such core emotional competencies: perceiving one's own and others' emotions, emotional expression, empathy, emotional regulation, coping with distress, and emotional self-efficacy. Expanding on this groundbreaking work, Lau (2006) synthesized the construct of emotional competence into two dimensions: perceptual and behavioral, adding that it encompasses three basic components: identifying

emotions, communicating them, and coping effectively with negative emotional experiences. For this study, the framework of Coleman (1970) is adopted, outlining five major competencies of EC:

1. **Adequate Depth of Feeling** – the ability to experience emotions meaningfully and with authenticity.
2. **Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions** – expressing emotions appropriately while maintaining self-control.
3. **Ability to Function with Emotions** – managing emotions effectively to sustain normal functioning.
4. **Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions** – recognizing and managing destructive emotions.
5. **Encouragement of Positive Emotions** – fostering positive emotional states that promote personal growth and well-being.

In essence, emotional competence represents the developmental capacity to understand, manage, and express emotions constructively within social contexts. It plays a vital role in adolescents' psychological adjustment, interpersonal relationships, and overall personality integration.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several studies relevant to the variables and population of the present research are reviewed below. These studies provide valuable insights into the existing body of knowledge concerning the selected variables and contribute to a deeper understanding of the topic as explored by various researchers.

Eriksen, E.V., and Bru, E. (2021) conducted a study titled “The Links of Social-Emotional Competencies, Emotional Well-Being, and Academic Engagement among Adolescents.” The study examined the relationships between social-emotional competencies, emotional well-being, and academic engagement. Findings indicated that perceived emotional regulation ability had the strongest association with emotional well-being, followed by relationship status. Additionally, planning related to school activities was found to be most closely linked to both dimensions of academic engagement. These results suggest that social-emotional learning interventions designed to enhance adolescents' emotional well-being should place particular emphasis on developing emotional regulation and relationship-building skills.

Perveen, A., Hamzah, H., Kee, P., Abas, N. A. H., Othman, A., Morgul, E., and Daud, N. A. M. (2018)

conducted a study titled “The Difference in Youth Emotional Competency Level Between Gender, and Institutes, Tunas Bakti, Secondary School and University Students in Malaysia”, involving 262 youths aged between 13 and 22 years old. The results revealed that most participants scored at an average level across all emotional competency subscales, with the majority obtaining higher scores in the emotional expression subscale. Independent *t*-test analyses indicated that female participants scored significantly higher in self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management compared to males. However, there were no significant gender differences in self-management subscales or in overall emotional intelligence scores.

The study by Salavera, C., Usán, P., and Jarie, L. (2017) titled “Emotional Intelligence and Social Skills on Self-Efficacy in Secondary Education Students: Are There Gender Differences?” involving 1,402 Spanish secondary school students aged 12 to 17 years (50.71% males). The study examined the relationships among self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and social skills. Results indicated that these constructs were positively related and that students’ perceived self-efficacy varied according to their emotional intelligence and social skills. However, gender did not have a significant influence on self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, or social skills. The correlation indices for these variables were similar for both males and females, suggesting that the relationship between self-jealousy efficacy, emotional intelligence, and social skills is not gender-sensitive in this population.

Habib, U., Habib, O., and Ansari, S. (2016) conducted a study titled “Emotional Competence in Male and Female Adolescents of Jammu and Kashmir” that examined gender differences in emotional competence among adolescents. The findings revealed a significant difference in emotional competence between male and female adolescents ($t = 9.74, p = .05$). Female adolescents ($M = 93.60$) demonstrated higher overall emotional competence compared to male adolescents ($M = 81.59$). Further analysis of emotional competence dimensions showed that females scored significantly higher on happiness ($M = 9.90$), love ($M = 9.83$), and interest ($M = 10.10$). However, no significant gender differences were observed in the dimensions of anger, sadness, and, while differences were evident in happiness, love, interest, and sympathy.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of the present investigation has been stated as,

“A Comparative Study on Emotional Competence among Male and Female Adolescents”

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE -The term Emotional Competence refers to a person's ability in expressing or releasing their inner feelings (emotions). It implies an ease around others and determines one's ability to effectively successfully lead and express.

ADOLESCENTS - Adolescents belong to the transitional period between puberty and adulthood in human development, extending mainly over the teen years and typically ending when a person reaches the age of legal adulthood

HYPOTHESIS

1. There will be a significant difference in emotional competence of male adolescents than females.
2. There will be a significant age group difference among the two age groups (viz, 15- 17, 18-19) on emotional competence.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Numerous studies have been conducted to measure emotional competency among youth. Exploring the differences in emotional competency between male and female adolescents helps us understand and predict various aspects such as emotional tolerance, responsiveness, and regulation across genders. Society often imposes stereotypes regarding emotional expression and tolerance, which compel many adolescents to reshape their emotional behaviors to conform to social expectations. This pressure can lead to emotional suppression, psychological distress, depression, and behavioral problems.

Adolescence represents a critical transitional stage from childhood to adulthood—often described as a period of “storm and stress.” During this phase, analysing and understanding emotional competency is essential for helping individuals comprehend and manage their emotions effectively. The present study aims to examine gender differences in emotional competency across various adolescent age groups. Understanding whether

male or female adolescents exhibit greater capacity to control, cope with, and express emotions can offer valuable insights into their future potential in areas such as career development, leadership, and self-awareness as responsible citizens. Additionally, this study focuses on five subcomponents of emotional competency to identify the specific areas where significant gender differences exist, as well as those where emotional competencies are relatively similar between males and females.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

In the present study, the investigator used the normative survey method. The normative survey method describes and interprets what exists at present. It is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, practices that prevail, beliefs, points of view or attitude that are held, processes that are going on, influences that are being felt, or trends that are developing. The following are the details of the methodology, which was formulated with a view to test the hypothesis of the present investigation.

SAMPLE

Sample size of the present study is 153. The participants come in the age range of 15-19 years. The sample was drawn from Kerala. The sample was taken by using the characteristic of stratified random sampling technique.

VARIABLES

The main variables used in the study are Adequate depth of feeling (ADF), Adequate expression and control of emotions (AEC), Ability to function with emotions (AFE), Ability to cope with problem emotions (ACPE), and Encouragement of positive emotions .

TOOL

A research tool employs distinctive ways of describing and qualifying the data. Each tool is particularly appropriate for certain sources of data yielding information of the kind and in the form that would be most effectively used. EC Scale (Emotional Competency) (Dr Harish Sharma and Dr Rajeev Lochan Bharadwaj, 1995) was designed to measure the Emotional Competency of normal people. The reliability of the scale has been derived by employing two methods, viz, test-retest and split- half method

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUE

t-Test

The t-test is one of the most widely used tests of significance in psychological research. t- Test is used to test the significance of the difference between the mean performances of two groups on some measure of behaviour. There are three factors that influence the test of significance such as the t-test. One is the size of the difference between means. In general, the larger the measured differences, the more likely that the difference reflects an actual difference in performance and not chance factors. A second factor is the size of the sample, or the number of measurements being tested. The third factor that exerts an influence is the variability of the data, or how the scores are spread out from one another (Cowls & Davis, 1982) In the present study independent sample t-test was used to analyze the difference between males and females and age groups on the variable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyses exploring the difference between males and females on the variable Emotional Competence

The total sample consisted of 153 participants with 77 males and 76 females. The difference between males and females on the variable of the study was analyzed using independent sample t-test. The results of independent samples t-test of the various study variables are presented in Table 1

TABLE 1

Sl. No.	Variable	Females (76)		Males (77)		t-value
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
1.	Total	90.29	18.135	97.56	16.794	-2.573*
2.	ADF	16.07	4.272	18.14	4.195	-3.034**
3.	AEC	17.43	3.519	19.49	3.932	-3.412**
4.	AFE	16.62	3.878	18.77	4.416	-3.195**
5.	ACPE	18.17	4.200	19.47	4.074	-1.938 NS**
6.	EPE	21.68	4.212	21.84	4.136	-0.237 NS**

Comparison of males and females on the variables under study

*denotes correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

** denotes correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed) NS**

denotes Not Significant

The results shown in the table indicates that there exists a significant difference between the total emotional competency of males and females. Here the mean value obtained by the adolescent ifemales is 90.29 and that of the adolescent males is 97.56. The t-value obtained is -2.573 which is statistically significant. Incase of Adequate Depth of Feeling (ADF), the result shows that there exists a significance between males and females. The mean value obtained by the females is 17.88 and that by males is 16.84. The corresponding t-value is found to be -3.034 which is statistically significant.

The result also indicates that there exists a significance between the two groups (Males and Females) for the variable Adequate Expression and Control of emotions (AEC). The mean value of females for AEC is 17.43 whereas for males it is 19.49. The t-value is found to be -3.412 which is statistically significant. For the variable Ability to Function with Emotions (AFE), there exists a statistical significance between males and females. The mean value of females for AFE is found to be 16.62 and that for males is 18.77. The t-value of this variable is found to be -3.195 which is statistically significant.

The variable ACPE (Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions) seems to show no significance between

male and female population. The mean value for females was found to be 18.17 and that of males 19.47. The t-value of ACPE is - 1.938 which is statistically insignificant. The results of the variable Encouragement of Positive Emotions (EPE) shows that there exists no significance between male and female population. The mean value of females was found to be 21.68 and males 21.84. The t-value of the variable was found to be -0.237 which is statistically not significant.

In sum, the results shows that there exists a significant relation between the total of emotional competency, ADF, AEC and AFE. It is evident that males seems to show higher ability in dealing with emotional competence, adequate depth of feeling, adequate expression and control of emotions and ability to function

with emotions. This would have been contributed by many factors like the environment they live in, the societal norms, influence of male hormones, parenting style etc...

Analyses exploring the differences among age groups on the variable.

This section attempts to analyze the difference among the age groups on various variables of emotional competency. The statistical techniques used for the analysis aimed exploring the differences between groups was t-test. The total population of 153 participants is divided into two age groups ; 15-17 and 18-19. The result of the t-test are shown below

TABLE 2

6.	EPE	21.48	3.863	21.87	4.273	-0.511 NS**	arison of
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Sl. No	Variable	Group 1 (15-17)		Group 2 (18-19)		t-value
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
1.	TOTAL	94.88	14.339	93.62	18.912	0.382 NS**
2.	ADF	17.88	3.715	16.84	4.533	1.296 NS**
3.	AEC	18.60	3.003	18.42	4.133	0.246 NS**
4.	AFE	17.98	3.555	17.60	4.521	0.473 NS**
5.	ACPE	18.78	3.690	18.84	4.348	-0.085 NS**

Age wise categories on different variables : Results of t-test

NS** denotes Not Significant

The above results indicate that there is no significant difference among age groups for all the variables under study. The t-value obtained for the total on emotional competency is 0.382 and the mean scores of the age groups are 94.88 and 93.62. For ADF, the t-value obtained is 1.296 with mean scores of 17.88 and 16.84. The t-value obtained for AEC is 0.246 and the mean scores are 18.60 and 18.42. For AFE, the t-value is 0.473 and the mean scores are 17.98 and 17.60. For ACPE, t-value is found to be -0.085 and mean scores obtained are 18.78 and 18.84. The t-value for EPE is -0.511 and the mean scores for the variable is 21.48 and 21.87. All t-values were statistically insignificant. Here we can conclude that age wise difference doesn't make any significant difference between individuals on the variables under study.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. There exists a significant difference in the total emotional competency of male and female adolescents.
2. There is no significant difference between the different age groups on emotional competency.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study explored emotional competency among adolescents and was conducted with a sample of 153 students from Kerala. Emotional competency refers to an individual's capacity to intentionally and effectively experience, express, and regulate a range of emotions, as well as to understand the emotions of oneself and others. It plays a crucial role in shaping leadership qualities, decision-making abilities, relationship management, and overall potential for success in professional, personal, and social domains.

Emotional competency enables individuals to navigate various aspects of life successfully. Those with higher emotional competence tend to flourish across different life contexts, as it reflects one's ability to apply emotional awareness and regulation effectively rather than merely possessing internal emotional skills.

Previous research has established significant relationships between emotional competence and other constructs such as self-awareness, social awareness, relationship management, academic engagement, and self-efficacy. Emotional competence influences both social and personal aspects of life, shaping an individual's ability to adapt and cope effectively.

The findings of the present study revealed that male adolescents demonstrated higher levels of emotional competence, particularly in adequate depth of feeling, expression and control of emotions, and functioning with emotions. These differences may be attributed to various factors, including environmental conditions, societal expectations, gender norms, hormonal influences, and parenting styles.

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