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Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Student Engagement: Evidence from Higher Education

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Abstract: ***Emotional intelligence plays an important role in how students understand their feelings, respond to challenges, and interact with people around them. College life involves many academic and personal situations, such as completing assignments, preparing for examinations, and working with classmates, communicating with teachers, and making decisions about the future. These things have chance to induce student's active participation in their academic activities. Therefore, the present study examines the relationship between emotional intelligence and student engagement among college students in higher education. The study focuses on understanding students' emotional intelligence and their level of engagement in academic activities. Data were collected from college students using a structured questionnaire consisting of statements related to emotional intelligence and student engagement. The collected data were analyzed using statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis. The study is intended to identify whether emotional intelligence is associated with students' engagement and to understand the extent to which emotional intelligence contributes to their academic involvement. The findings of the study will offer meaningful insights for educationalists and educational institutions to aid the students in developing their interpersonal skills and emotional stability in addition to academic development. Overall, the study highlights the importance of considering emotional abilities as one of the factors that may contribute to a positive and engaging higher education experience.***

Index Terms - Emotional Intelligence, Abilities, Student Engagement, Interpersonal Skills, Education Experience.

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is not only about gaining academic knowledge and earning a degree. During College days, students learn to communicate with others, build relationships, manage responsibilities, handle challenges, and become more confident in making decisions.

Students are needs to be active in classroom practices with their classmates, communicate with teachers. So in higher education students engagement becomes important. It includes their effective participation in academic activities, emotional connect with the institution and learning progress.

Higher levels of engagement are generally associated with better learning experiences, academic performance, and persistence in education.

Every student responds to college life differently. Students' behaviour and emotions influenced by the workload, exams, relationship with others, family and societal demands some students able to balance the things but others may find it difficult to manage. The ability to identify and understand one's emotions, control emotional reactions, and respond appropriately to the emotions of others is commonly referred to as emotional intelligence (EI). EI is very relevant in higher education due to the emotional control requirements in communication, decision making and public relations.

Earlier studies reported positive relationship between student's engagement and emotional intelligence. Students are finding it easy to manage the pressure from academics, better public relations and motivated to face the difficulties if they are able to understand and manage their emotions.

For example, Maguire et al. reported that trait emotional intelligence was positively related to cognitive and affective engagement among undergraduate students. This obviously clarifies that how students emotionally and actively. Similarly, a longitudinal study involving 560 first-year university students found that emotional intelligence positively predicted different aspects of student engagement and that engagement was linked with academic and university-related outcomes.

However, emotional intelligence alone cannot explain why some students are more engaged than others. Student engagement can be affected by several personal and educational factors. Teachers support, learning atmosphere, peer relationship, their psychological needs, learning experiences etc. all influence engagement. Recent studies have therefore explored emotional intelligence together with other psychological and educational factors. These studies indicate that the relationship between emotional intelligence and student engagement can be influenced by several interconnected factors rather than being a simple direct relationship. This creates a need for further research among students from different educational backgrounds and institutional settings.

In this context, the present study focuses on the relationship between emotional intelligence and student engagement among college students. The study aims to understand whether students with different levels of emotional intelligence also show differences in their involvement and participation in academic life. Examining this relationship can provide a better understanding of the personal factors that may contribute to students' engagement in higher education. The findings may also be useful for teachers and educational institutions in developing student-development activities that focus not only on academic performance but also on emotional skills, interpersonal relationships, confidence, and overall student well-being.

II. Review of Literature

Abbas, Ali and Shah (2025) explored EI and academic engagement among university students at several campuses of the University of Sargodha in Pakistan, drawing on a sample of up to 1,000. They measured EI with a 33-item scale and engagement with a 15-item scale, then compared the two and checked for gender differences. According to their results, students with good EI levels also showed good levels of academic engagement.

Alkharj et al. (2024) looked at stress among 367 Saudi nursing students and what protects their engagement. Students who felt more stressed reported lower engagement, lower EI and weaker emotion regulation, while those with stronger EI and regulation skills were more engaged. The modelling suggested that EI and emotion regulation help explain the link between stress and engagement. The authors argued that nursing programmes should teach stress management and emotional skills.

Barragán Martín et al. (2021) turned to adolescents and examined whether self-esteem sits between EI and school engagement. Their 1,287 Spanish high school students showed positive correlations between every EI factor, self-esteem and the three engagement dimensions of vigour, dedication and absorption. Self-esteem explained part of the effect for the intrapersonal, stress management and adaptability factors, but not for the interpersonal and mood factors. They proposed that schools run emotional competence programmes to support both self-esteem and engagement.

Bereded, Abebe and Negasi (2025) tested whether engagement is the route through which EI influences grades. Their data came from 1,351 first-year students at Wollo University in Ethiopia. Trait EI was moderately related to both engagement and achievement, and engagement was strongly related to achievement. Engagement partly explained how EI affects grades, and EI and engagement together accounted for nearly half of the variation in achievement. They recommended that educators build both EI and engagement.

El Dirani et al. (2021) asked whether engagement explains anything about grades once EI is already accounted for. Working with 93 Lebanese business students, they ran a hierarchical regression on CGPA. EI components alone explained about 17% of the variation, and adding engagement lifted this to roughly 23%, a statistically meaningful gain. Social emotional awareness and engagement helped predict grades, while relationship management pointed the opposite way. The authors linked this pattern to Lebanon's collectivist culture.

Halimi, AlShammari and Navarro (2021) looked at whether EI relates to grades among 480 students at a private Kuwaiti university, measuring EI with the 16-item Wong and Law scale. Higher GPA went with stronger self-emotion appraisal and use of emotions, whereas age, gender, nationality and school background showed no direct connection. The results also suggested the scale works reliably with Kuwaiti students, and the authors pointed out that EI may be interpreted differently across cultures, so cross-cultural testing is needed.

Gebregergis et al. (2023) studied 119 undergraduates at an Eritrean college to see how EI, engagement and demographics relate to CGPA. Overall EI did not predict grades, but managing one's own emotions and using emotions did. Overall engagement predicted grades, with behavioural engagement the strongest of its three parts. Among the demographic factors, only programme of study mattered: psychology and educational administration students did better than science education students. Gender and age made no difference.

Gebregergis et al. (2025) described how students at an Eritrean college score on EI and engagement. Among 119 senior students, most showed moderate to high levels of both. Women scored higher on EI and behavioural engagement, while psychology and educational administration students had higher EI than science education students, who in turn showed greater cognitive engagement. Older students were more engaged, although EI did not differ by age. The authors offered practical suggestions for colleges that want to nurture emotional skills and engagement.

Gunasekara et al. (2022) gave a voice to students themselves by running four online focus groups with 14 undergraduates from an Australian university's Melbourne and Malaysian campuses. Their themes covered how lecturers handled vulnerability and empathy, the trust and safety students felt, the tone and clarity of communication, and how students read their lecturers' emotions. Lecturers' EI clearly shaped how engaged students were online, but its effect looked different in Australia and Malaysia. This led the authors to suggest culturally aware, EI-based practices for online teaching.

Iqbal et al. (2021) studied 338 Chinese university students during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the relationships students form with teachers and classmates, which they called relational engagement. Self-regulation, self-awareness and social skills each improved cognitive outcomes directly, and all five EI dimensions strengthened relational engagement. Relational engagement in turn improved cognitive outcomes and carried part of the effect of EI. In short, emotionally intelligent students seemed to learn better partly because they built supportive relationships.

Maguire et al. (2017) wanted to know whether a student's own emotional intelligence helps explain how engaged they are at university. They tested 91 psychology undergraduates in Ireland and took account of academic ability, gender and engagement during secondary school. Students with higher trait EI reported stronger cognitive and affective engagement. Past grades added to the picture for cognitive engagement, while earlier emotional engagement at school carried over into current affective engagement. The authors suggested that building EI could be a practical way to improve engagement and, indirectly, performance.

Thomas and Allen (2020) asked why EI is linked to engagement and tested academic buoyancy, a student's ability to cope with everyday academic setbacks, as the explanation. Using responses from 253 undergraduate and graduate students in the United States, their path model showed that higher EI went with more behavioral and emotional engagement and less disaffection on both dimensions. Buoyancy carried part of that effect for behavioral engagement, emotional engagement and emotional disaffection, but not all of it. They argued that colleges should teach emotional skills deliberately to strengthen coping and engagement.

Welmilla (2020) approached the topic from the opposite direction by asking students how emotionally intelligent their lecturers were. Data from 1,455 undergraduates at Sri Lankan state universities showed a strong positive link between teachers' EI and student engagement (r = 0.703), with social awareness and relationship management both contributing. Teachers' EI accounted for nearly half of the variation in engagement. Students described their lecturers' emotional competence as decent but not outstanding, which led the author to argue for training lecturers in these skills.

Yang and Yang (2026) pulled together recent research (2021–2026) in a narrative review of 28 sources on how EI and self-regulated learning shape engagement and performance. The evidence consistently showed a positive link between EI and self-regulated learning. EI often worked indirectly through self-directed learning, self-efficacy, the balance between engagement and burnout, social support and metacognition. They cautioned that much of the evidence comes from nursing and medical students, so it may not apply to all learners. They also noted that EI and self-regulation can be trained but that intervention studies are often weak, and they called for longitudinal, cross-cultural and technology-based research.

EI was a strong driver of self-directed learning, and students who learned more independently went on to earn better GPAs, develop stronger generic skills and feel more satisfied with university life. A closer regression showed that three abilities mattered most: managing one's own emotions, recognizing one's own emotions, and helping regulate other people's emotions.

Zhoc et al. (2021) combined surveys with interviews in a mixed-methods follow-up of 560 first-year students in Hong Kong. The numbers showed a clear pattern in which higher EI went with better learning, engagement and achievement. The interviews explained why, describing emotionally intelligent students as goal-driven, assertive and good at managing their own learning. The authors concluded that EI helps first-year students adapt and perform well during a demanding transition.

III. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and student engagement among college students. A descriptive and correlational research design was used to understand the students' levels of emotional intelligence and engagement and to determine whether the two variables are related.

3.2 Objectives:

- To assess the level of emotional intelligence among higher education students.
- To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and student engagement.

3.3 Population and Sample

The study focused on college students in higher education. Data were collected from 315 respondents who participated in the study. The respondents provided their responses through a structured questionnaire prepared for measuring emotional intelligence and student engagement.

3.4 Data Collection

The study used primary data collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained statements related to emotional intelligence and student engagement, and respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a five-point Likert scale. The responses were then organized and analyzed using SPSS.

3.5 Tools used for Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS. Cronbach's Alpha was used to check the reliability of the questionnaire items. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to understand the overall levels of emotional intelligence and student engagement. Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and student engagement. Simple linear regression was used to determine whether emotional intelligence significantly predicts student engagement. The results were interpreted using a 5% level of significance.

3.6 Research Variables

The study included two main variables. Emotional Intelligence (EI) was considered the independent variable, while Student Engagement (SE) was considered the dependent variable. The study examined whether students' emotional intelligence is associated with and contributes to their level of engagement in academic activities.

3.7 Research hypothesis:

H0: There is no significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Student Engagement among college students.

H1: There is a significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Student Engagement among college students.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for Student Engagement

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.914	5

Interpretation

The reliability of the five Student Engagement items was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. The obtained value was 0.914, which indicates a very high level of internal consistency among the items. This suggests that the questions used to measure student engagement were consistent and reliable for the present study. Therefore, all five items were retained for further analysis.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	315	5	25	18.5714	4.44578
Student Engagement	315	5	25	18.3651	4.67078

Interpretation

The descriptive analysis was conducted for Emotional Intelligence and Student Engagement among the 63 respondents. The mean score for Emotional Intelligence was 18.57, while the mean score for Student Engagement was 18.37. Since both variables have a possible score ranging from 5 to 25, the results indicate that the respondents generally reported relatively positive levels of emotional intelligence and student engagement. The standard deviation values of 4.45 for Emotional Intelligence and 4.67 for Student Engagement show that there was some variation in the responses among the students.

4.3 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 3: Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Student Engagement

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Emotional Intelligence & Student Engagement	**0.851**	**0.000**	315

Interpretation

Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Student Engagement. The results show a strong positive correlation between the two variables, with a correlation coefficient of r = 0.851. The significance value is 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, the relationship is statistically significant. This indicates that students with higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to report higher levels of student engagement.

4.4 Regression Analysis

Here your analysis becomes even stronger.

Table 4: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
0.851	**0.725**	0.720	2.47153

Interpretation

Regression analysis was conducted to examine whether Emotional Intelligence predicts Student Engagement. The model produced an R value of 0.851, indicating a strong relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Student Engagement. The R Square value of 0.725 indicates that Emotional Intelligence explains approximately 72.5% of the variation in Student Engagement among the respondents. The adjusted R Square value was 0.720, showing that the model remains strong after adjustment.

4.5 ANOVA

Table 5: ANOVA

Model	F	Sig.
Regression	**160.430**	**0.000**

Interpretation

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant, with an F-value of 160.430 and a significance value of 0.000. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, the regression model significantly predicts Student Engagement from Emotional Intelligence. Therefore, Emotional Intelligence is a significant predictor of Student Engagement among the college students included in the study.

4.6 Regression Coefficients

Table 6: Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.757	1.348	—	1.304	0.197
Emotional Intelligence	0.894	0.071	0.851	12.666	0.000

Interpretation

The regression coefficient for Emotional Intelligence is 0.894, with a standardized beta value of 0.851 and a significance value of **0.000**. Since the significance value is below 0.05, Emotional Intelligence has a statistically significant positive effect on Student Engagement. The positive coefficient indicates that an increase in Emotional Intelligence is associated with an increase in Student Engagement.

The regression equation can be written as:

Student Engagement = 1.757 + 0.894 × Emotional Intelligence

This means that for every one-unit increase in Emotional Intelligence, Student Engagement is expected to increase by approximately **0.894 units**.

4.7 Hypothesis Testing

Research hypothesis:

H0: There is no significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Student Engagement among college students.

H1: There is a significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Student Engagement among college students.

4.8 Pearson correlation test result:

$r = 0.851$, $p < 0.001$

Therefore:

Decision: Reject H0 and Accept H1**.**

Interpretation

The study found a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Student Engagement. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The results suggest that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement in their academic environment.

Conclusion

The study shows that the students who participated in the survey had fairly good levels of emotional intelligence and student engagement, with average scores of 18.57 and 18.37 respectively. The student engagement scale also showed good reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.914. The correlation result showed a strong positive connection between emotional

intelligence and student engagement ($r = 0.851$, $p < 0.001$). The regression result further showed that emotional intelligence explained 72.5% of the variation in student engagement ($R^2 = 0.725$), and the model was statistically significant. This suggests that students who are better at understanding and managing their emotions are more likely to stay involved and participate actively in their academic activities.

Suggestions

Colleges can focus on students' emotional development along with their academic growth. Activities such as group discussions, teamwork, communication exercises, and simple stress-management programmes can help students handle challenges and become more comfortable participating in college activities. Teachers can also maintain a friendly and supportive classroom where students feel free to share their thoughts and ask questions. Providing proper mentoring and counselling can help students deal with academic or personal difficulties. Future studies can include students from different colleges and examine other factors, such as motivation, stress, confidence, and support from teachers, to get a broader understanding of student engagement.

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