

# INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS, INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS, AND SPECIFIC DIMENSIONS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN ROMANIAN STUDENTS

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## **Abstract**

This research analyzes emotional intelligence through a comparative study of two educational systems. On one hand, the Romanian private, confessional educational system, and on the other hand, the private distance learning educational system. The latter educational system is regulated in the United States of America, and the study examines Romanian students enrolled in such a system and studying from within Romania. The research reveals positive correlations between distance learning and high scores on the emotional intelligence test in the dimension of emotionality, well-being, sociability, and self-control, and at the same time, positive correlations between grade level and the dimension of sociability, as well as between the male gender and the dimension of sociability. Positive correlations were found between female gender and sociability and well-being.

## **Keywords**

Distance learning, emotional intelligence, types of education, Romanian educational system

## **INTRODUCTION**

With the development of the concept of emotional intelligence and its diversified relationships with fields such as

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medicine, business, leadership, sports, among others, the academic realm proposes research on the interactions between this type of intelligence and behaviors, adaptability, satisfaction, and even academic performance. Without diminishing the importance of cognitive intelligence, the socio-cultural context imposes at least a dual pedagogical approach, rational cognitive (IQ), and emotional (EQ).

The multitude of reforms brought to the Romanian education system, besides the lack of coherence and evaluation of ever-changing measures, does not propose solutions that contribute to the development of emotional intelligence.

The idea that education should exclusively address the development of the left hemisphere of the brain, namely rational, intellectual development, and language, began to be dominated at the end of the 20th century by the paradigm of the interaction between emotional and cognitive intelligence. Although this paradigm of the interpenetration of the two types of intelligence has many opponents (Brody, 2004; Matthews et al., 2004; Rietti, 2008), the plethora of studies in favor of the development of emotional intelligence and its impact on education makes it unavoidable (Kelly et al., 2004; Furnham & Petrides, 2003; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

This study aims to analyze and compare the effects of two distinct educational systems on students' emotional intelligence: the Romanian private educational system and the private distance learning educational system regulated in the United States. By examining Romanian students enrolled in distance learning programs and comparing them with those in traditional private education, this research aims to identify correlations between educational contexts and EI dimensions such as emotionality, well-being, sociability, and self-control.

This study addresses the following research problem: How do different educational systems impact the emotional intelligence of students? By providing insights into the relationship between education types and EI, this research seeks to inform

educational policymakers and practitioners about the potential benefits of incorporating EI development into educational curricula.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Emotional intelligence**

The interrelationships between emotions and reason are increasingly studied. Emotional intelligence, which finds its origins in the limbic system, becomes increasingly important in the equation of life success through research. The amygdaloid nucleus reacts in moments of crisis and transmits stimuli, strong emotions that were previously stored in emotional memory, and the limbic system triggers impulses that are not analyzed by the brain but through instincts and automatisms, the human body reacts.

The pioneers of the conceptualization of emotional intelligence are Thorndike and Gardner. The former introduced the concept of social intelligence, and the latter developed the theory of multiple intelligences. The terms interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence first appeared. One targets the regulatory relationships with the surrounding environment, and the other targets the relationships with oneself (Ri-etti, 2008).

Emotional intelligence is concretized into four dimensions (Mayer et a., 2004):

1. Emotion awareness
2. Using emotions to facilitate thinking
3. Understanding emotions
4. Managing emotions

Another approach is that of Bar-On (2006): intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, mood. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is closely correlated with moral and civic values.

In opposition to these perspectives, Waterhouse (2006) considers that emotional intelligence is not a valid construct because it refers to cognitive intelligence in its relations with human personality. Others argue that emotional intelligence is not sufficiently supported by high-quality research (Matthews et al., 2004). In the same year, Gohm (2004) responded to these objections, and the following years saw a wide range of studies validating the conceptualization of emotional intelligence.

### **Emotional intelligence in recent studies**

Emotions play an important role not only in survival but also in decision-making, communication, and setting boundaries (Roco, 2001). Given the role and presence of dopamine in the functioning of the human body, a neurotransmitter controlled by the limbic system, we cannot exclude emotions from the judgment and decision-making process.

Based on a meta-analysis, Hodzic et al. (2018) compared scores on emotional intelligence tests before and after certain training sessions aimed at developing participants' emotional intelligence. The results of these studies demonstrate that the training sessions are effective and are influenced by the type of conceptualization of emotional intelligence and the length of the training. Several researchers reached the same conclusions (Kotsou et al., 2019; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019). On the other hand, the same studies do not identify significant differences in results based on gender.

When referring to the measurement of emotional intelligence, the specialized literature proposes a multitude of research and conceptualization paradigms. Some present three ways of conceptualizing. The first is ability or competence. The second is personality trait, and the third is the mixed model. O'Connor et al. (2019) consider the research method

that takes emotional intelligence as a personality trait to be the best predictor.

Goleman and Boyatzis (2017) are proponents of mixed conceptualization and propose 12 factors of emotional intelligence, grouped into 4 areas:

1. Emotional self-awareness
2. Emotional self-management or adaptability
3. Social, organizational awareness
4. Relationship management through mentoring, coaching, inspirational leadership, etc.

Another paradigm is the pyramid of emotional intelligence composed of two levels (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2018):

1. Self-control, self-knowledge - discrimination
2. Social skills - expertise

A study conducted on teachers identified minimal levels of emotional intelligence in teachers with high scores in burnout, anxiety, depression, and stress. These also had low scores in personal fulfillment (Martinez-Monteagudo et al., 2019). A similar study conducted on adolescents revealed a positive relationship between well-being and the level of trait emotional intelligence. Between stress, anxiety, and emotional intelligence, a negative relationship was evident (Cejudo et al., 2018).

MacCan et al. (2020) studied the relationships between academic results and ability-based emotional intelligence. The study results reveal a stronger correlation between emotional intelligence and performance in humanities subjects than in sciences. The personality trait, emotional intelligence, was identified as a stronger predictor of obtaining good grades throughout the year than standardized test results.

## **Distance learning**

Distance learning refers to an umbrella concept that encompasses a variety of forms and methods of formally educating

students other than traditional face-to-face learning. Distance learning can include parts of blended learning, online learning, television learning, satellite learning, etc. The educational act can take place synchronously or asynchronously. Synchronous learning involves connecting all students in the class to the online course taught by a teacher. All students participate in the lesson simultaneously. They can work together on various tasks or just actively participate in the taught content. After the lesson, students have assignments or projects they can complete individually or in teams but without being connected to the teacher or the entire class. Asynchronous learning is exclusively student-centered. Depending on deadlines, assignments, projects, and learning content can be completed at any time. In such situations, the distance learning school provides students with a curriculum, tools, and content to guide their educational act. Weekly, they are guided by a teacher who monitors each student's progress. Most distance learning schools use both synchronous and asynchronous learning types. Research on distance learning reveals that academic, cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes of the two types of education, distance learning, and classroom learning, do not differ significantly. Students in both types of education learn equally well (Cyrs & Conway, 1997; Deloughry, 1988; Keene & Cary, 1990; Moore & Thompson, 1990).

Traditional education provides a learning environment in which students and teachers meet face to face organized according to certain parameters of time and space. According to a set timetable, all at the same time, all in the same place.

Distance learning eliminates the limitations imposed by space and time parameters. Student participation in online courses is higher than in traditional education, and the environment is less intimidating. In such a context, students more easily share their personal opinions, emotions, and knowledge than in a traditional, physical classroom (Blonna & Shapiro, 2000). Additionally, the quality of submitted assignments and

projects is better, time limitations are fewer, students' responses are better prepared, feedback is more supportive, and questions are better formulated.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The type of research is descriptive. The differences between variables were not modified by external contributions, and from the perspective of time-related research, the type of research is cross-sectional. Approval was obtained from the principals of the targeted educational institutions, and training was conducted to apply the research instrument. The study's impact, the conduct of the research, and ethical information were presented. The tests were sent to the private school with physical presence, and teachers supervised their proper completion. For those studying at the distance learning school, the questionnaires were sent via an online document, and completion was done online during a Zoom session. Each student completed the digital document on their computer. Data analysis obtained from the instrument application was performed using SPSS software.

### **Objectives**

It is important to note that correlation does not necessarily imply causation. The study presents the relationships between educational systems and EI scores. The findings are limited since they only present correlations between the educational systems, individual characteristics, and specific dimensions of EI. Thus, the investigation looks at the relationship between the two educational systems and students' emotional intelligence scores, between intelligence scores and class and between intelligence scores and gender.

Objectives of the research:

1. Analyze the scientific literature regarding the concepts used in the research.

2. Determine the EI levels of 7th and 8th-grade students in Romanian private education and distance learning.
3. Compare EI scores by gender, grade level, and type of education.
4. Interpret the results.

## **Hypotheses**

H01: There are no statistically significant differences between the emotional intelligence test scores, based on the type of education of the students participating in the research.

H02: There are no statistically significant differences between the emotional intelligence test scores, based on the gender of the subjects participating in the research.

H03: There are no statistically significant differences between the emotional intelligence test scores, based on grade levels.

## **Variables**

The variables corresponding to the chosen objectives and hypotheses are four: gender, type of education, grade level, and emotional intelligence. Gender, type of education, and grade level are the independent variables, while emotional intelligence is the dependent variable.

## **Tools**

The independent variables were integrated into a questionnaire consisting of three questions regarding the type of education, gender, and grade level. This questionnaire was attached to the emotional intelligence assessment instrument.

We used the short Trait Emotional Intelligence questionnaire developed by Petrides and Furnham (2001) to measure the dependent variable, emotional intelligence. Eliza Spătăreanu (2021) validated the instrument in Romanian. Both the instrument's authors and the validator provided permission for

using the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the instrument's validation in Romanian was 0.813.

The score obtained by each student represents the sum of the points for each of the five dimensions. The five dimensions are: Auxiliary, Well-being, Sociability, Emotionality, and Self-control. Each trait assigned to the five dimensions is tested by two items, one positive and one negative. Before summing the results, the scores of negative statements were reversed. Of the 102 subjects surveyed, 17 students wanted to know their results.

The Trait Emotional Intelligence questionnaire divides the 30 questions into the following traits: Adaptability, Self-motivation, Optimism, Happiness, Self-image, Emotion Management, Assertiveness, Social Competence, Empathy, Emotion Perception, Emotion Expression, Relationships, Emotion Regulation, Impulsiveness, Stress Management.

1. I express my feelings easily.
2. I don't like to see things from another's perspective.
3. I am a very motivated person.
4. I find it hard to control my emotions.
5. I do not have an agreeable life.
6. I get along very well with my colleagues.
7. I often change my mind.
8. I find it hard to identify my exact emotions.
9. I am satisfied with the way I look.
10. I can't fight for my rights.
11. I can make others feel better if I set my mind to it.
12. Sometimes I think my entire life will be unhappy.
13. Sometimes others complain that I treat them badly.
14. I find it hard to cope with changes in my life.
15. I react positively in stressful situations.
16. I don't know how to show those close to me that I care about them.
17. I like to put myself in someone else's shoes and understand their emotions.

18. I find it hard to stay motivated.
19. I can control my anger when I set my mind to it.
20. I am happy with my life
21. I am a good negotiator.
22. Sometimes I get involved in things I wish to withdraw from later.
23. I carefully analyze my emotions.
24. I feel good about myself.
25. I am inclined to back down even if I am right.
26. I am not capable of changing others' emotions.
27. I believe that eventually things will work out well for me.
28. I can't have good relationships with my parents.
29. I am capable of handling myself well in a new environment.
30. I try to control my thoughts and not worry too much about the future.

### **Population and sampling procedure**

The sample was non-probabilistic. The data necessary for the study were obtained from the completion of the emotional intelligence assessment instrument by the students present on the day of the instrument application. The students participating in the study were those from the 7th and 8th grades of the Omega Adventist School and those from the 7th and 8th grades of the ALTIS distance learning school. The instrument was applied to 51 students from traditional education and 51 from distance learning. Of the 51, 24 were in the 7th grade, and 27 in the 8th grade. Of the 51 ALTIS school students, 28 were in the 7th grade, and 23 were in the 8th grade.

## RESULTS

The variables discussed are: influence of grade level, type of education system, emotion expression, life satisfaction and happiness, self-image and confidence in success, assertiveness, stress management and gender.

### **Influence of grade level**

The statistical analysis reveals significant differences in emotional intelligence scores based on grade level. There are positive correlations between grade level and the dimension of sociability. Significant differences were found in favor of those in the 7th grade regarding assertiveness ( $p = 0.016$ ). The item referred to the idea of being open, sincere, candid, and advocating for personal rights.

Analysis across different grade levels revealed a positive correlation specifically with sociability as students advance in their education. Notably, students in the 7th grade showed significantly higher levels of assertiveness (It 25,  $p = 0.016$ ), with a mean score of 3.82 compared to 2.81 for other grades. This suggests that 7th-grade students are more open, sincere, and assertive in advocating for their rights. The standard deviations were 2.08 and 1.97, indicating a slight variation in assertiveness scores within each group.

### **Type of education system**

The study explored the impact of distance learning on emotional intelligence (EI) and found positive correlations with higher scores in the dimensions of emotionality, well-being, sociability, and self-control. Students from distance learning environments demonstrated significantly higher capabilities in communicating their feelings ( $p = 0.002$ ), overall life satisfaction and contentment ( $p < 0.001$ ), self-confidence in achieving personal success ( $p = 0.005$ ), assertiveness ( $p = 0.041$ ), and stress management abilities ( $p = 0.042$ ).

**Emotion expression** (It 1,  $p = 0.002$ )

Students in the distance learning environment scored significantly higher in expressing emotions ( $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) compared to those in traditional education ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ), indicating a better ability to communicate feelings.

**Life satisfaction and happiness** (It 5,  $p < 0.001$ ): The same group recorded higher scores on life satisfaction indicators, suggesting a higher level of personal contentment.

**Self-image and confidence in success** (It 9,  $p = 0.005$ ): Students showed increased confidence in personal success, reflecting a positive self-image.

**Assertiveness** (It 10,  $p = 0.041$ ) and **Stress management** (It 30,  $p = 0.042$ ): The results indicate greater assertiveness and improved stress management ability.

### **Gender**

Positive correlations were found between male gender and the dimension of sociability, and between female gender and sociability and well-being. Significant differences were found in favor of girls regarding social skills (It 6,  $p = 0.038$ ,  $M = 5.44$ ,  $SD = 6.03$ ) and confidence in personal success (It 24,  $p = 0.034$ ,  $M = 5.41$ ,  $SD = 6.05$ ). Significant differences were found in favor of boys regarding the ability to influence others' emotions (It 11,  $p = 0.03$ ,  $M = 6.10$ ,  $SD = 5.46$ ).

### **Hypothesis testing**

H01: There are no statistically significant differences between the emotional intelligence test scores, based on the type of education of the students participating in the research. This hypothesis is rejected in the dimensions of emotionality, well-being, sociability, and self-control.

H02: There are no statistically significant differences between the emotional intelligence test scores, based on the gender of the subjects participating in the research. The null hypothesis is rejected in the dimensions of sociability and well-being.

H03: There are no statistically significant differences between the emotional intelligence test scores, based on grade levels. The null hypothesis is rejected in the dimension of sociability.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The findings from this study suggest that distance learning has significant positive correlations on several dimensions of emotional intelligence (EI) compared to the traditional Romanian educational system. Specifically, students engaged in distance learning displayed higher capabilities in emotionality, well-being, sociability, and self-control.

One of the key observations is the enhanced ability of distance learning students to express their emotions and communicate their feelings effectively. This could be attributed to the more flexible and less socially pressured environment that distance learning provides. The digital medium might offer students a safer space to articulate their emotions, free from the immediate judgments of peers.

Furthermore, the increased life satisfaction and confidence in personal success among distance learning students indicate that this mode of education might foster a stronger sense of personal accomplishment and well-being. The self-paced nature of distance learning allows students to manage their academic responsibilities alongside personal interests and activities, contributing to overall happiness and self-assurance.

The higher levels of assertiveness and stress management observed in distance learning students are particularly noteworthy. These skills are crucial for personal and professional success, suggesting that distance learning might better prepare students for future challenges by promoting independence and resilience.

The study also highlights the developmental differences in EI across grade levels, with 7th-grade students showing greater

assertiveness. This finding is consistent with developmental psychology literature, which suggests that early adolescence is a critical period for developing self-advocacy and social skills. As students mature, their ability to navigate social interactions and assert themselves improves, which is reflected in their higher EI scores.

Gender differences in EI were also significant, with girls demonstrating superior social skills and confidence in personal success, while boys excelled in influencing others' emotions. These differences underline the importance of incorporating gender-sensitive approaches in educational practices to cater to the distinct emotional and social development needs of boys and girls.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study underscores the profound correlations of educational environments on the development of emotional intelligence. Distance learning, in particular, shows potential benefits in enhancing various EI dimensions, suggesting it can be an effective alternative to traditional education for fostering emotional and social competencies.

These findings offer valuable insights for educational policymakers and curriculum developers. Integrating emotional intelligence training within educational systems could enhance students' overall development, preparing them for personal and professional success. The results also emphasize the need for future research to further explore the dynamics between educational contexts and emotional intelligence, ensuring that educational practices are tailored to meet the diverse needs of learners effectively.

In conclusion, the positive correlations between distance learning and higher EI scores indicate that a holistic approach to education—one that balances cognitive and emotional development—is essential. As the educational landscape

continues to evolve, understanding and leveraging the benefits of different educational systems will be crucial in nurturing well-rounded, emotionally intelligent individuals.

The obtained results provide a basis for future research on the differences between the two educational systems and, at the same time, on the impact of the educational context on various dimensions of emotional intelligence.

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