

HARMONY IN HEARTS: UNRAVELING THE BONDS BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND PEER BELONGINGNESS IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

People's interactions with their environment in life are greatly influenced by their emotions. The success of the social environment is influenced by each individual's capacity to understand their own feelings, as well as those of others, and to control their behavior in accordance. This study aims to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness among undergraduate students. Grounded in Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory, the study employs a quantitative research design with a correlational methodology. A sample of 130 undergraduate students (69 female, 61 male) was selected using random sampling, ensuring representation across gender, locality, and academic streams. Data were collected using the Assessing Emotions Scale (Schutte et al., 2009) and the Peer Belongingness Scale (Sameer & Neetha, 2021). The findings of this study elucidate that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the total sample of undergraduate students. The female students showed a stronger positive correlation than the male undergraduate students. Locality-wise analysis revealed that rural students had a stronger relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness

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than urban students. It shows that students from rural localities are better at regulating their emotions and are more engaged in developing their interpersonal relationships. Lastly, streamwise analysis revealed that non-science students had a stronger relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness than science students. The study provides educational implications, advocating for interventions that enhance Emotional Intelligence to improve students' sense of belonging in academic institutions.

Keywords

Emotional intelligence, peer belongingness, prosocial behavior, undergraduate students

INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

The concepts of emotion and intelligence are combined in order to form what is known as emotional intelligence (EQ). In the course of their lives, people's feelings play a significant role in the relationship they have with the world around them. Being conscious of one's own feelings as well as being able to identify the feelings of other people and guide their behavior accordingly, has a significant impact on the quality of the interactions that take place in social settings. In order for any of these things to take place, a person must first be able to put himself ahead of other people's needs and wants.

Emotional intelligence refers to a person's capacity to understand not just their own feelings but also those of other people, as well as to respond appropriately to the emotions of both themselves and those around them. As humans, we are always evolving, which is why our emotional intelligence is something that can never stop growing. The capacity for emotional intelligence, often known as EQ, is one that must be cultivated.

Mayer and Salovey (1990) defined the term Emotional Intelligence (EQ) as the capacity to recognize, access, and

produce emotions in order to support and comprehend emotions and their underlying meanings.

Goleman (1998) explains: “the ability to understand one’s own and other people’s emotions in order to motivate and manage emotions in our own lives and in our relationships is known as emotional intelligence. If emotions are handled well in a work environment, it can promote loyalty, trust, and commitment”.

Components of emotional intelligence

1. Self-awareness - having a realistic understanding of one’s strengths and flaws as well as awareness of one’s emotions and their significance. It also includes having self-confidence.

2. Managing emotions - emotional regulation, being truthful and reliable, and exhibiting flexibility and commitment that are appropriate to the situation.

3. Motivation - regulating one’s emotions to direct them toward a purpose.

4. Empathy - the ability to comprehend another person’s emotional viewpoint.

5. Handling relationships - use one’s own and other people’s personal information to manage social interactions and improve interpersonal skills.

Peer belongingness

Humans are social animals and cannot exist alone. No man is an island, as Aristotle correctly observed. In order to live a healthy life, people must have their needs met. Being social creatures, humans must also meet psychological requirements in addition to their physiological needs. The desire for belonging is one of these. Being associated with others is a basic need that involves a hierarchy of needs,

including those for safety, respect, self-actualization, and aesthetics. These needs combine to form the basis of the human drive. A person who misses their partner, friend or other important people in their life may wish to be a part of a family or group in order to fill the void left by these relationships. If a person's need to belong is not satisfied, they may suffer the pain of alienation, rejection, exclusion, the loss of friendship, and the sensation of being uprooted. A common threat might be present when this need arises. It's essential to satiate the need to belong in order to live and thrive. Here, we attempt to grasp the importance of belonging to one's peer group during the development of adolescence.

Peer belongingness is described in terms of the group members' feelings (i.e., like versus disliking) towards the child and the extent to which these feelings become consensual. It pertains to children's connections with peers (e.g., classmates) and is important for children to feel a sense of belonging (Ladd et al., 1997). It takes a lot of time and effort to be a part of a peer group, and friends frequently have more of an impact on a student's life than family. The two ideas of peer and belongingness are combined to form peer belongingness.

Defining belongingness

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the desire to belong is so intrinsic to human nature that missing out on it has serious implications. Lack of sense of belonging would not have such severe effects on us if it were not so essential. The drive to belong is so pervasive that it permeates all civilizations and sorts of individuals.

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the degree to which an individual feels included, respected, accepted, and

supported by others in a variety of social circumstances is one of the characteristics that has been cited as constituting a sense of belonging in the research.

Defining peer

Children and adolescents who are roughly the same age or who have reached a similar level of development are considered to be peers. A group of people of equal rank is referred to as a peer group, and often, members of a peer group are children of the same age as one another. This is the first opportunity a youngster has to interact with others on an equal level. According to Seltzer (2006), the teenage peer group originates as a deliberate association of people who are in the same developmental stage as them and are looking for self-definition, integration, and prescription. These individuals go through the same physical, emotional, and cognitive changes, and they are in the same developmental stage. As a child goes about their everyday activities and interacts with their peer group, they learn how to behave towards others outside of their home. They gain knowledge of cooperation, leadership, social roles, and teamwork. They gain the ability to respect others and to comprehend, evaluate, and appreciate their views and feelings. Additionally, the peer group offers a safe foundation for stepping away from the supervision and protection of the family and toward greater independence. The group's participants provide a source of moral support and inspiration for one another.

According to Brown and Larson (2009), a peer group is a collection of people who are on equal footing with one another. Peer groups gain respect, social position, and power in the eyes of other teenagers by living similar lifestyles. As a result, young adolescents with the strongest

social skills are more likely to be a part of a peer group that is well-regarded by peers their own age. Early adolescents' conduct can be influenced by their desire to fit in with a group of friends even before they join; they adopt their classmates' behaviors in order to fit in. Both the desire to be liked by others and the positive reputation that results from it help to moderate their interactions.

According to Brown and Larson (2009), teenagers are capable of having both a beneficial and a bad influence on one another. The interaction between the processes of selection (looking for "someone like me") and socialization is what determines this (inter influence).

Young adolescents who are having personal problems gather with others who are going through the same thing on one side (Catalano et al., 2004). Sieving et al. (2000) claim that, because younger teens are seen by their peers as more "with it," they are more vulnerable to the influence of the "in group" on them to engage in dangerous behaviors.

Adolescents are vulnerable to peer pressure, but this susceptibility varies from group to group and person to person. Teenagers locate their identities more in their peer groups than in their families. In order to get its members to follow the group's rules and priorities, the peer group exerts influence and control over them. Peer groups are essential in forming a person's attitudes, values, conduct, and personality and can have either a positive or negative effect on the individual. Parents are extremely important in assisting their children in selecting their classmates. A sense of belonging, which is linked to improved academic success, positive behaviors, and beneficial social outcomes, is more likely to be felt by students who have active social

relationships with other kids and adults, such as teachers (Ellis et al., 1998; Kunc, 1992).

METHODOLOGY

Significance of the study

People's interactions with their environment in life are greatly influenced by their emotions. The success of the social environment is influenced by each individual's capacity to understand their own feelings, as well as those of others, and to control their behavior in accordance. For this, a person must be able to see himself as a priority in order to enable all these things to occur. This introduces the idea of emotional intelligence. Better social functioning is linked to the many dimensions of emotional intelligence. To put it another way, those who are better at identifying and managing their own emotions appear to be more able to establish and sustain strong social ties with their parents and peers. College students who feel a sense of belonging, a crucial component of social functioning, experience less anxiety, melancholy, loneliness, and social anxiety. While a lack of social ties with their surroundings may be a contributing factor, these emotions are lessened when students have a sense of belonging.

The connection between emotional intelligence and belongingness among college students is not entirely understood, despite evidence pointing to a link between emotional intelligence and better-quality social interactions with peers. To the knowledge of the researchers, some studies have been done to date in developed countries that have examined the relation of emotional intelligence with other variables, including relational engagement, cognitive outcomes, mental health, and cooperative inclinations, but

none of the direct studies has been found with relation to peer belongingness (Güler, 2022; Moeller et al., 2020; Petrides, 2001). However, some of the studies have been done with variables like peer interactions, prosocial behavior, and social competence (Anike et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). In emerging nations like India, to the best of the knowledge of the researchers, no direct studies have been found with regard to emotional intelligence and peer belongingness. Although some studies have been conducted on emotional intelligence with other variables like social skills, cooperative tendencies, and social value orientation (Iqbal et al., 2021; Kumar, 2020).

The studies were carried out, according to a review of related literature, in both a national and international context. In the International context, the majority of the previous studies were carried out using emotional intelligence in relation to mental health, social competence, and relational engagement (Iqbal et al. 2021; Moeller et al., 2020; Shafait et al., 2021), but none of the direct studies has been found with relation to peer belongingness. Nevertheless, some research has been done using variables social skills, prosocial behavior and peer relationships (Anike et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021).

Research gap

In the Indian context, very few studies have been found related to emotional intelligence and peer belongingness (Iqbal et al., 2021; Kumar, 2020; Malekar & Mohanty, 2009). Despite studies suggesting the link of emotional intelligence to better quality relationships with peers, it is still not completely understood how it relates to emotional intelligence and belongingness in college students. The researchers experienced a gap in the research and the need for

additional studies to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the Indian scenario. So, the researchers chose these variables and conducted a study specifically focusing on undergraduate students belonging to different localities and coming from different choices of streams. The findings will contribute to both theoretical and practical knowledge, helping institutions foster emotionally supportive environments that enhance students' social well-being and academic success.

Research problem

In higher education, students' ability to form meaningful peer relationships significantly impacts their emotional well-being, academic engagement, and overall development. Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a vital role in shaping these interactions by helping individuals recognize, understand, and regulate emotions effectively. While existing literature has extensively explored EI in relation to mental health, academic success, and interpersonal skills, limited studies have focused on its direct relationship with Peer Belongingness (PB), particularly in the Indian context. The lack of research on how EI influences students' sense of inclusion within their peer groups highlights a critical gap in understanding the social dynamics of higher education. Without a clear comprehension of this relationship, educators and policymakers may struggle to implement strategies that enhance students' social and emotional well-being.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to investigate the relationship between Emotional intelligence and Peer belongingness among undergraduate students. It seeks to determine whether students with higher EI experience stronger peer connections

and how factors such as gender, locality, and academic stream influence this relationship.

The researchers formulated the following questions to give the thrust to their research:

1. Is there any relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the total sample of undergraduate students?
2. Is there a gender difference in the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness?
3. Whether a relationship exists between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in undergraduate students belonging to different streams?
4. Whether a relationship exists between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in students of different locality?

Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To find out the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the total sample of undergraduate students.
2. To find out the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the sub-sample based on gender of undergraduate students.
3. To find out the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the sub-sample based on locality of undergraduate students.
4. To find out the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the sub-sample based on stream of undergraduate students.

Sample

The sample consists of 130 undergraduate students (69 female and 61 male students) of Aligarh Muslim University. The sample was selected through a random sampling technique giving due representation to sub samples gender, locality and stream.

Tools

The study is based on two scales: The Assessing Emotions Scale (Schutte et al., 1998) and Peer Belongingness Scale (Babu & Neetha, 2021) with the established reliability and validity.

The Assessing Emotion Scale consists of 33 items under four factors, including the perception of emotion, managing own emotions, managing other emotions, utilization of emotions.

In order to prove the internal consistency of AES, the investigators used Cronbach Alpha Test. Many other investigations have proven the 33 item's internal consistency scale. As determined by Cronbach's alpha displays the internal consistency for various sample sizes. Over all samples, the mean alpha is .87, which signifies a high degree of internal consistency among the items. Thus, the scale is internally consistent. The Assessing Emotions Scale is a five-point Likert scale consisting of 33-item focusing on typical emotional intelligence under four factors.

Peer Belongingness Scale: This scale was developed by Babu & Neetha (2021), and it has six components. Peer Belongingness refers to the relationships that children have with members of their peer group (such as their classmates), and it is characterized in terms of the sentiments (such as liking or disliking) that group members have toward the kid, as well as the degree to which these sentiments become

consensual. The following conceptual definitions of the peer belongingness sub-dimensions are slightly redefined-Connectedness, Inclusion in the group, Use of friends, Emotions and Dynamic nature of friendship.

RESULTS

The null hypotheses were framed according to the aforementioned objectives.

Hypothesis 1

There is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the total sample of undergraduate students.

Table 1 displays the correlation matrix that shows the strength of the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the total sample of undergraduate students. The result showed that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness among undergraduate students, $r(128) = .514, p = .000$. This denotes that changes in emotional intelligence are associated with the same changes in peer belongingness. It can be interpreted that an increase in emotional intelligence leads to a corresponding increase in peer belongingness. Thus, the null hypothesis that ‘there is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the total sample of undergraduate students’ is **rejected**.

Hypothesis 2

There is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the female sub-sample of undergraduate students.

Table 2 highlights the correlation matrix that shows the strength of the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the female sub-sample of

undergraduate students. The findings revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness among female students, $r(67) = .626, p = .000$. It shows that the higher the emotional intelligence of female undergraduate students, the higher will be their peer belongingness. Thus, the null hypothesis that “there is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the female sub-sample of undergraduate students” is **rejected**.

Hypothesis 3

There is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the male sub-sample of undergraduate students.

Table 3 indicates the correlation matrix that shows the strength of the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the male sub-sample of undergraduate students. The result revealed that there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness among male students, $r(59) = .417, p = .001$. It can be inferred that with the increase in the emotional intelligence of male undergraduate students, their peer belongingness will also increase. Thus, the null hypothesis that ‘there is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the male sub-sample of undergraduate students’ is **rejected**.

Hypothesis 4

There is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the rural sub-sample of undergraduate students.

Data tabulated in Table 4 shows the correlation matrix, which indicates the strength of the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the rural sub-sample of undergraduate students. The result showed

that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness among students belonging to the rural locality, $r(35) = .682, p = .000$. It can be assumed that the increase in the emotional intelligence of undergraduate students belonging to rural locality is likely to be accompanied by an increase in their sense of belonging. Thus, the null hypothesis that ‘there is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the rural sub-sample of undergraduate students’ is **rejected**.

Hypothesis 5

There is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the urban sub-sample of undergraduate students.

Table 5 displays the correlation matrix that shows the strength of the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the urban sub-sample of undergraduate students. The result showed that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness among urban students, $r(91) = .454, p = .000$. It denotes that any change, whether increase or decrease in emotional intelligence, is liable to cause similar changes in peer belongingness of undergraduate students belonging to an urban locality. Hence, the null hypothesis that ‘there is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the urban sub-sample of undergraduate students’ is **rejected**.

Hypothesis 6

There is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the non-science sub-sample of undergraduate students.

Table 6 highlights the correlation matrix that shows the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer

belongingness in the non-science sub-sample of undergraduate students. The result showed that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness among non-science undergraduate students, $r(64) = .614, p = .000$. It can be assumed that an increase in an undergraduate student's sense of belonging will go hand in hand with an increase in their emotional intelligence if they are from the non-science stream. Hence, the null hypothesis that 'there is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the non-science sub-sample of undergraduate students' is **rejected**.

Hypothesis 7

There is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the science sub-sample of undergraduate students.

Table 7 indicates the correlation matrix that shows the strength of relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the science sub-sample of undergraduate students. The result showed that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness among science stream undergraduate students, $r(62) = .429, p = .000$. It can be inferred that the rise in emotional intelligence among undergraduate students from science streams likely to be accompanied by a rise in their sense of belonging. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the science sub-sample of undergraduate students is **rejected**.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness among undergraduate students. In addition, it also

intended to comprehensively investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer Belongingness in the sub-samples of undergraduate students based on their gender, stream and locality. The result showed that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness in the total sample of undergraduate students. It is also clear from the result that the students showing high emotional intelligence are also having high peer belongingness. Peer relationships are significantly influenced by emotion. Successful peer relationships are correlated with the capacity to control emotions. Individuals who are depressed and emotionally hostile are more likely to be rejected by their peers, whereas those who are happy and optimistic are more well-liked. In the study of Karaman and Tarim (2018), the findings stated that the students would be happier if they felt like they belonged at the university. University students' expectations, teacher support, and sense of community appear to be connected to their feelings of belonging to the university

Zhoc et al. (2018) showed that students with high emotional intelligence are more involved in their learning because of the relationships they make with their teachers and peers. Similarly, Olivier et al. (2019) found that emotional Intelligence positively influences relational engagement, a significant relationship was found between the two among the undergraduates. Fredricks et al. (2004) referred to the idea of relational engagement with peers, teachers, and the school as an emotional engagement. As social inclusion, social integration, social belonging, and social involvement are all characteristics of relational engagement, which is also related to one of the sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence, namely social skills.

Ciarrochi et al. (2001) have shown that higher emotional intelligence scores are linked to more social acceptance and fewer rejection experiences. These findings support the idea that having a higher emotional intelligence in multiple areas leads to better social functioning. To put it another way, people who are more adept at recognizing and controlling their own emotions seem to be better able to create and maintain wholesome social bonds with parents and other adults. Jaworowska and Matczak (2001) indicated that the ability to function in social situations improves with higher emotional intelligence levels.

Levine et al. (1997) stated that people who are emotionally dependent cooperate more frequently than people who are rationally dependent. Sun et al. (2015) indicated that good peer relationships could help people develop positive character traits and interpersonal trust as a beneficial condition of social support. As a result, peers who trust one another tend to cooperate more than peers who haven't developed that level of trust. This implies that college students should completely trust their peers when collaborating in order to effectively achieve shared objectives. As the peer group provides a supportive environment for identity development. A climate for growth and self-knowledge that the family is ill-equipped to give and that very few others can provide them, including adolescent friendships. This is the distinctive advantage of friendship among adolescents.

Another finding of the study revealed the strength of the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness according to gender sub-sample. The female showed a stronger positive correlation than the male undergraduate students. It can be seen that females are better at building interpersonal relationships because they exhibit more nurturing behavior, an empathic mindset, and a

caring personality, the possible reason behind it the innate ability of parental care nature among females in comparison to males. Even though men are more adaptable, optimistic, and self-assured. In comparison to girls, boys' friendships tend to be more active and less personal. So, it can be said that boys are less susceptible to emotional trauma and can manage stress more effectively than women.

As per the proposed ability model and mixed model of emotional intelligence illustrated that people with high emotional intelligence (EI) are able to recognize and express their emotions clearly, comprehend the feelings of others, and build and maintain mutually satisfying and responsible interpersonal relationships. They can also increase their social support while creating a reliable connection to the outside world. In the previous research (Brown et al., 1986; Brown & Lohr, 1987), it was found that adolescent girls place more significance on belonging to a group than boys and are more strongly bonded to their peer groups than boys.

Similarly, the study of various other researches (Cairns et al., 1995; Galambos, 2004) revealed that female adolescents have more friends than male adolescents do, and those female adolescents also exhibit higher levels of empathy, self-disclosure, and lower levels of overt hostility in their friendships. They also expect and demand more caring behavior from their friends. Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus (1994), Rose and Meyer (2007) illustrated that girls are more likely than boys to engage in ruminative coping, which is dwelling on unpleasant circumstances and the negative emotions connected to issues and that they participate in greater co-rumination, which makes them more susceptible to their companions' suffering. Even though males

may not gain as much as girls from the sense of belonging that is a product of deep, lasting friendships, boys are less sensitive to the emotional agony that is likely to accompany high levels of disclosure and co-rumination.

Boys and girls may have different ways of speaking about or describing their friends, which can hide the significance of how much a sense of association affects a person's mental health. However, it implies that establishing a sense of peer group integration shows a range of healthy coping abilities, such as problem-solving, effective communication, and emotional control (Beam et al., 2002; Farrington, 2004; Graber, 2004). Contrary to these findings, Ribera et al. (2015) revealed that gender and age had not found their role in peer belonging and institutional acceptance.

Locality-wise analysis revealed that rural students had a stronger relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness than urban students. It shows that the students belonging to a rural locality are better at regulating their emotions and are more engaged in developing their interpersonal relationships. It is a common observation that rural people have better social skills, more empathetic and caring behavior towards others, and also sustain healthy, responsible, and mutually satisfying relationships with one another than urban people. The possible reason for this may be that rural people have more time compared to urban and they spend it with their peers, family and relatives that, which fosters their interpersonal relationships. The researchers also elucidate the findings in the context of the university residential hostels, where it is generally observed that the residential students belonging to rural localities are very attached to their peers of their same locality and show very cooperative attitudes toward them, it may be the cultural impact of a rural community that influence their social

skills, which is one of the dimensions of the emotional intelligence and helps in managing peer relations while the individual belonging from urban locality having busy life schedule that restricts their relational engagement including social participation, inclusion, and integration, which is one of the aspects of the emotional intelligence that implies to a feeling of attachment to others. This suggests that social functioning is improved when a person has a higher emotional intelligence

Contrary to the above findings, Mahato (2016) revealed that urban adults have higher levels of emotional intelligence as compared to adults from rural areas. The study of Ribera et al. (2015) highlighted that the students' perception of institutional acceptance was unaffected by their living conditions. After adjusting for student demographics, college experiences, and institutional features, individuals who lived on campus reported the same levels of institutional acceptance as those who resided off campus.

Lastly, streamwise analysis was done, and it was revealed that non-science students had a stronger relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness than science students. A study by Qayyum (2016) discovered a reduction in medical students' emotional intelligence in this area; he also noted the necessity for future doctors to acquire the skills necessary to manage their own emotions as well as those of their patients. Hence, the researchers suggest that the skill set which is essential for emotional intelligence is to be developed in science students, which will help them to establish prosocial behavior. Eisenberg's theory of prosocial behaviors states that people develop prosocial behavior through paying attention to others' needs, deciding to help others, and linking intention and behavior. The higher a person's EI, the more accurately they will be

able to gauge the emotions of those around them and the greater the likelihood that they will participate in PSB.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study sought to elucidate the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer belongingness. These findings suggest intervention efforts for the stakeholders, including college students, teachers, university or college administration and policymakers.

To start with teachers, they should place a focus on students' relational engagement and involve them in various intellectual activities (such as promoting discussion, asking students to explore their ideas, and helping students to form positive relationships with their peers). In addition, educators must determine which pupils are lacking in emotional intelligence (EI) and instruct these students on how to raise their EI by delving deeper into the various aspects that comprise it (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy etc.) one at a time. Furthermore, collaboration between teachers and students is important for building trust in educational institutions. As in academic institutions, trust is disappearing. This loss of faith makes educational institutions' services even poorer. Consequently, it is impossible for the administration, professors, and students to collaborate efficiently. Emotional support from teachers can improve students' trust in the institution, their sense of belonging there, their willingness to try new things and take risks, their motivation to learn, their ability to remember what they've learned, how satisfied they are with their studies, and their overall experience in class.

Secondly, students should take part in co-curricular activities and other pursuits since they enable them to bring out the best in their friends, view one another from new

perspectives, and enjoy common interests. These activities also play a crucial role in the development of their friendships. Through these activities, they have a sense of familiarity with college. In addition to co-curricular activities, involvement in learning communities and service-learning projects like participating in the students' union, eco-club, drama club, literary club, different committees of the department etc., in which having a formal student leadership position also made them feel more accepted by their peers and by their institutions. Also, participating in psychological seminars and workshops can help to increase the emotional intelligence and social competencies among students.

Thirdly, a university environment and its customs and traditions help students feel socially supported by their peers and other students, particularly significant for those who experience further marginalization at college as a result of their socioeconomic standing, gender, sexual orientation, race, or ethnicity. Campus programs that encourage frequent and healthy contact between students must to be supported in order to continue functioning as effectively as possible. Lowering experiences of rejection should be a goal in addition to raising students' sense of belonging. Further, targeting and enhancing emotional intelligence would also be a possible strategy for prevention and intervention efforts associated with a sense of belongingness. They should organize engagement programs, including high-impact practices (HIPs) that have been shown to be beneficial in encouraging student learning, growth, and perseverance, therefore, institutions should establish programs including learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research, internships, capstone projects, and study abroad. Further, group guidance and individual counseling should be organized regularly in which the guide or counselor acts

actively and offers support while the young adolescent is going through a trying time. The youth look forward to spending time with the counselor, having enlightening conversations with him or her, and making every effort to obey the counsel given.

The administration also encourages student collaboration on research as peer interactions are crucial to the growth of college students since they are in the transitional stage between adulthood and entering society. College students will work more effectively in research collaboration if they respect and trust their collaborators more. So, the administration and organization of the research team should promote social support and not overlook peer relationships. All of these can increase interdependence and personal gain, which considerably encourages productive collaboration in scientific study. Further, workshops and training programs should be organized to address the issues with emotional intelligence and stress as students show more favorable perceptions of and relationships with teachers who have higher emotional intelligence. Last but not least, Punishment should be avoided in school as prosocial people receive punishment, and their level of cooperation declines as a result of a decline in interpersonal trust.

Lastly, policymakers and practitioners at higher education institutions (HEIs) should reevaluate, redesign, and establish new policies and procedures to help well-trained professionals improve HEIs' responsiveness to deal with the needs of demanding situations with resolve, emotional intelligence, and greater learning. In order to increase their capacity for learning, emotional intelligence teaches students to make sensible assessments of the situation, to have faith in their professors, and to be aware of the institution's principles and standards. It may be suggested to design

policies that address satisfying the needs of students for belonging in universities. In accordance with these principles, universities should, for instance, encourage the formation of student organizations by providing the chance for activities where students may feel the flow and by planning fun social events. Further, the emotional intelligence content should be a part of the curriculum because it will help children cope with the challenging circumstances of post COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

The study takes inspiration from ideas found in previous works as well as the theory of student involvement. Both researchers and practitioners in the field of education can benefit from the findings. The researchers emphasized the significance of paying attention to the students' connections with emotional intelligence and peer relations and found a positive relationship between them. Although there are a number of restrictions that need to be taken into account before generalizing the findings because of the small sample size this study opens the discussion about several ways the university community might cooperate to improve EI, as an individual with strong emotional intelligence can recognize their own emotions, express them effectively, comprehend others' emotions, and build and maintain mutually beneficial and responsible interpersonal connections with their peers and teachers in the university.

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APPENDICES

Table 1

Pearson correlation matrix in the total sample of undergraduate students

Correlations		EI Score	PB Score
		1	
EI Score	Pearson Correlation		.514**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	130	.000
	N		130
PB Score	Pearson Correlation	.514**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	130	130

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2

Pearson correlation matrix in the female sub-sample of undergraduate students

		Correlations	
		EI Score	PB Score
EI Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.626**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	69	.000
	N		69
PB Score	Pearson Correlation	.626**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	69	69

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3

Pearson correlation matrix in the male sub-sample of undergraduate students

		Correlations	
		EI Score	PB Score
EI Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.417**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	61	61
PB Score	Pearson Correlation	.417**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	61	61

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4

Pearson correlation matrix in the rural sub-sample of undergraduate students

		Correlations	
		EI Score	PB Score
EI Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.682**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	37	37
PB Score	Pearson Correlation	.682**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	37	37

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5*Pearson correlation matrix in the urban sub-sample of undergraduate students*

		Correlations	
		EI Score	PB Score
EI Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.454**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	93	93
PB Score	Pearson Correlation	.454**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	93	93

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6*Pearson correlation matrix in the non-science sub-sample of undergraduate students*

		Correlations	
		EI Score	PB Score
EI Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.614**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	66	66
PB Score	Pearson Correlation	.614**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	66	66

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7

Pearson correlation matrix in the science sub-sample of undergraduate students

		Correlations	
		EI Score	PB Score
EI Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.429**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	64	64
PB Score	Pearson Correlation	.429**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	64	64

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).