

## The relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment in pre-university girl students in Tehran

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### Suggested Citation:

Sobhani, Z., Mousavi, S. M. & Akbari, B. (2018). The relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment in pre-university girl students in Tehran. *Global Journal of Guidance and Counseling in Schools*. 8(2), 77-85.

Received from July 10, 2017; revised from June 05, 2018; accepted from August, 02, 2018.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Kobus Maree, University of Pretoria South Africa.

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### Abstract

Regarding the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) in forming adjustment behaviours, the present study aimed at determining the relationship between EI and educational and socio-emotional adjustment in Iranian female students. In a descriptive-correlational study, 300 pre-university female students were selected through multi-stage stratified random sampling in Tehran province. Bar-On's emotional intelligence inventory and adjustment inventory for high school students were used as two standard instruments for data collection. The results suggest a significant relationship between the participants' EI and their educational and socio-emotional adjustment ( $P < 0.01$ ). Moreover, most of the students had high EI (51.3%). While the majority of the participants had a good level of emotional adjustment (59%), a moderate level of them enjoyed social and educational adjustment, 39.7% and 28%, respectively. Based on findings, it is proposed that elements of EI be trained to pre-university students so as to enable them to confront with problems and equip them with necessary adjustment skills.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence (EI), emotional adjustment, social adjustment, pre-university female students.

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## 1. Introduction

People are not the same in perception, cognition and exercising their emotions as they differ in the way they control themselves in everyday emotional conditions. Today, such distinctions are known as differences in emotional intelligence (EI) which plays an essential role in mental health (Chan, 2005; Mousavi Lotfi, Akbari & Safavi, 2009). EI is the latest development in understanding the relationship between thinking and emotion which is considered as the trigger of a huge revolution in developing mental health. The concept of EI is, in fact, a combination of social skills and competencies which affect individuals' abilities for recognition, perception and management of emotions plus problem solving and adjustment, effectively adapting individuals to cope with requirements, pressures and challenges of life (Bar-on, 2006).

Historically, the concept dates back to the 19th century when Darwin published his book in 1872. He proved exhibiting emotions plays an important role in an individual's adjustment behaviours, an important principle of EI that has been acknowledged by scholars so far (Noori & Nasirih, 2004). In their study, Engelberg and Sjoberg (2004) suggested EI as a general ability for emotional and social adjustment. Burns and Nettelbeck (2005) in their survey unveiled that high EI in teenagers has a direct relationship with better communication with their peer group, stronger social support networks, emotional stability and educational adjustment while poses an inverse relationship with maladjustments such as addiction, alcoholism and home run away. There is a disagreement among the scholars as for whether intelligence is a unitary concept or one composed of various elements and factors. Traditionally defined, intelligence quotient (IQ) has long been considered as the most important determinant of success and educational progress. Today, however, with the change in theoretical perspectives about composing factors of intelligence, it cannot be considered as a powerful predictive factor for educational improvement and adjustment (Adeymo, 2005; Marques, Gil-Olarte, Raquel & Bracket, 2006; Parker et al., 2004; Parker, Hogan, Eastabrook, Oke & Wood, 2006; Petrides, Frederickson & Furnham, 2004). In a majority of studies, EI is known as one of the most important and powerful effective factors on educational adjustment. In the same regard, Niesser, Boodoo and Bouchard (1996) also showed that people's score in intelligence tests is not a good predictor of educational progress and educational adjustment. Generally, a great number of research studies report that successful adjustment of people depends on the integrative performance of emotional competencies. In fact, EI plays an essential role in training adjustment to stressful experiences and events, predicting future goals, educational adjustment and also coping with chronic stresses (Chan, 2005). Extremera, Duran and Rey (2007) posed that teenagers who fail to understand their own emotions, and are not equipped with necessary abilities to regulate their emotions, are not able to control themselves in stressful conditions; hence, suffer more severe stresses and have low adjustments. While cognitive intelligence is estimated to account for almost 20% in predicting one's success, the remained 80% is among the skills shaping EI. Therefore, IQ does not give a prediction that how people react to ups and downs of life. Also, IQ and educational talents cannot prepare individuals to face life conflicts and make the best use of opportunities (Golman, 2000). Today, in the era of information explosion, successful adjustments in the young people necessitates them to be equipped with sufficient capacities and skills required for solving problems and making wise decisions so as to aid and then adjust themselves with the ever-changing life conditions via mental and emotional skills (Pasha, 2005). Obviously, youngsters of any nation are the main transmitters of its culture, yet this generation is prone to many incompatibilities in Iran such as psychological disorders, addiction, home run away, education abandonment and other delinquencies which can be attributed to degeneration of emotional competencies in them (Mousavi Lotfi et al., 2009). Statistics have depicted that in each year almost 20% of the teens and young people experience mental health-related problems. In 2006, a report by the Office of Social Disorders Prevention at Iran's Ministry of Education has revealed that 13.5% of Iranian students (more than 2 million of the whole population) are at high risk of addiction (Nikogoftar, 2006). Barzegar (2006) claiming that in recent years girls' home runaways have increased and states that more than 1 million teenagers escape from home every year; of which 74% are girls

and 26% are boys. A close look at the aforementioned problems shows that lack of emotional or social competency might be a cause of the complications. Well-organised preventive or corrective strategies can help teenagers to keep on the right track. As the studies pinpoint the significance of EI and the crucial role it plays in education, social interactions and mental health, understanding and assessing people's EI is necessary for strengthening their capabilities and improving the interpersonal relationship. This will help people in their endeavour to resolve their adjustment problems. Iranian educational system still hinges on the traditional concept of IQ and the status of EI in education is not acknowledged in the way it should be. Thus, the aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between Iranian female senior high school students' EI and their emotional, social and educational adjustment in Tehran in the academic year 2007–2008.

## 2. Method

In a descriptive-correlational study, 300 female high school students in Tehran aged 16–18 participated in the study in the academic year 2007–2008. Multi-stage sampling method was used to select the participants from fields of humanities, mathematics and experimental sciences in 10 municipality zones in Tehran, namely, the Zones 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13 and 15. In the first stage, 15 of 384 pre-university centres in Tehran were selected randomly. In the second stage, one class from each school was selected majoring in each of the three fields. In the third stage, 20, 10 and 5 students were randomly chosen in the fields of mathematics, experimental sciences and humanities, respectively. Care was taken to select an equal percentage of the students from each field. The instruments for data collection included a demographic questionnaire, Bar-On's emotional intelligence quotient questionnaire and high school student adjustment questionnaire (adjustment inventory for school students (AISS)). To evaluate the participants' EI, Bar-On's test was utilised. The self-report test includes 90 items in the form of short sentences and employs a Likert five-point response scale with a textual response format ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Each item has a value in the range of 5–1. This version of the inventory measures the test takers' EI in five dimensions and 15 sub-dimensions. The first dimension is personal skills with sub-dimensions of emotion, sense of self, self-esteem, self-actualisation, autonomy and assertiveness. The second dimension deals with interpersonal skills with sub-dimensions of empathy, interpersonal relations and social responsibility. The third dimension deals with problem solving, realism and flexibility. The fourth dimension deals with coping skills with sub-dimensions of stress management and impulse control. Finally, the fifth dimension taps into the general mood with sub-dimensions of happiness and optimism. The minimum and maximum scores are 90 and 450, respectively (Samooei, 2004). The reliability of the test was calculated in seven samples from different populations using test–retest method in 1 month by Bar-On. The average Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all sub-dimensions were reported ranging from 69.0 (responsibility) to 86.0 (self-esteem) with the mean reported as 76.0. The reliability analysis of the instrument based on the test–retest method also showed a reliability coefficient of 66.0 (Bar-on, 2000). The reliability of the instrument in Iran was calculated by Samooei (2004) through internal isotropy and even–odd method with Cronbach's alpha 93.0 and 88, respectively. Also, studies by Zavaraghi (2006) and Fatahzadeh (2006) indicated an acceptable validity of the instrument. AISS was also developed by Singha (1993) to evaluate students' adjustment in affective social and instructional domains. This questionnaire was translated into Farsi by Karami (2008) (1,377). This test includes 60 yes/no questions from which, 40 questions measure the affective and social domains. For adjustment and lack of adjustment, 0 and 1 points are assigned, respectively. For participants in adjustment, affective, social and educational domains, five levels are defined according to raw scores. In this line, for affective adjustment, the scoring procedure was as follows: A: very good (0–1), B: good (2–5), C: average (7–8), D: weak (8–10) and E: very weak (11 & more). For social adjustment, the scoring procedure was as follows: A: very good (0–2), B: good (3–4), C: average (5–7), D: weak (8–11) and E: very weak (12 & more). Finally, for the total adjustment, the scoring procedure was as follows: A: very good (0–5), B: good (6–12), C: average (13–22), D: weak: (23–31) and E: very weak: (32 & more). The content and external validity of the questionnaire was determined and reported by Karami

(2008) (1,377) using split-half method as 94.0 and 93.0 for the emotional and social adjustment, respectively.

### 3. Results

The demographic results of the study are summarised in Table 1. As the table suggests, the majority of the students were 18 years old (51.7%). Furthermore, 66.7% of the participants studied in the state-run high schools, 13.3% studied in the municipality zones 1%, 2%, 3%, 5%, 6% and 50% were majoring in the field of mathematics. Also, the grade point average (GPA) for the majority of the students was 18.20 and higher (46.7%) for those living in a family of four members (41.3%). Most of the students' fathers were self-employed (47.3%) and most mothers were homemakers (80%). The parents' education level was mostly diploma 44.7% and 57%, for fathers and mothers, respectively, with both parents as the legal guardian of the most students (94.7%) (Table 1). As Table 2 suggests, 51.3% of the participants had high EI and 48.7% of the students had low EI. Also, most of the participants had good emotional adjustment (56%) and average social adjustment (39.7%). No relationship was found between the participants' EI and their demographic characteristics such as age, type of education centre, educational major and number of people in family, parents' job and parents' education whereas the relationship between EI and GPA found to be significant ( $r = 0.18$ ,  $P = 0.02$ ,  $\chi^2 = 6.04$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The most frequent participants were those with high EI and good emotional adjustment (37.3%) while the least frequent participants were students with high EI whose emotional adjustment were very poor (0.3%). Regarding social adjustment, the most frequent participants were students with high EI (20%) and average social adjustment while the least frequent ones were those with high EI and very poor social adjustments (0.0%). As for educational adjustment, the most frequent participants were those with high EI and good educational adjustment (15.3%) while the least frequent group was the one with participants whose EI were very high but had very poor educational adjustment (0.7%). Results of statistical analysis demonstrate a significant relationship between EI and emotional, social and educational adjustment as well as the participants' total adjustment ( $P < 0.001$ ).

### 4. Discussion and conclusion

The results of this study provide important implication for understanding the relationship between EI and adjustment. Most of the participants in the study had high EI, good emotional adjustment and average educational and social adjustment. Moreover, from among demographic characteristics, only the relationship between the students' GPA and their EI found to be significant. This is similar to findings of studies reported by Tapia and Marsh (2006) and Besharat, Shalchi and Shams Pour (2006). Parker et al. (2004) also indicated that favourable educational performance and high GPA positively correlate with EI. Also, Petrides et al. (2004) in their study on 650 high school students in England found that EI is a predictive factor for educational success and students with high EI perform better and have higher GPA compared to others. The present study also exhibits a significant relationship between EI and emotional adjustment. This can be explained by the key components of EI, self-awareness and emotion management: people with high EI have more self-awareness; they have a deep perception of their emotions, weakness and strength, needs and interests; they have a realistic view of what happens in their life and are able to direct and control those events. These abilities play an important role in establishing and developing insight into the self and the surrounding environment and thus, improve the individual's ability to emotionally adapt themselves keeping them from giving in to the emotions. On the other hand, people with high EI are equipped with favourable emotional management and can better escape from negative emotions such as anxiety, depression and irritability. They face fewer problems in their lives and when faced, can quickly get rid of difficult and unfavourable situations and reach emotional stability and a desirable state (Burns & Nettelbeck, 2005; Engelberg, E. & Sjöberg, 2004; Hample & Peterman, 2006; Lopes, Salovey & Straus, 2003; Mousavi Lotfi et al., 2009; Noori & Nasirih, 2004). This study also suggests that there exists a significant relationship between EI and social adjustment. This is similar to a number of other research studies

(Adeymo, 2005; Burns and Nettelbeck, 2005; Chan, 2005; Marques et al., 2006). Based on the amended model of EI proposed by Mayer and Saloye (1997) who recognised four aspects of the construct, namely, emotional perceptions, emotional facilitation of thinking, emotional cognition and emotional management, the findings of the present research can be explained as follows: according to characteristics of emotional perceptions, emotional perception increases along with an increase in level of EI in individuals. This level of perceptions, increasing the power of evaluating environmental stimulants and improving the ability to establish emotional relations and showing empathy, increases organised function in individuals. This provides the necessary internal mental drives for individuals to adjust themselves to society. On the other hand, the feature of more emotional facility in individuals with higher level of EI can help them to confront with problems and challenges within society in a more organised way through organising thoughts and memory contents. Moreover, emotional facility inducing positive behavioural changes will help people to better adjust themselves to the environment and its stimulants. Similarly, through emotional awareness, in people with high EI, in addition to an increase in the probability of having an accurate and realistic understanding of their emotions, the prediction power and control over the emotions is improved and they apply more effective confrontation strategies against distress situations and emotions. Therefore, emotional awareness using the mechanism of prediction, control and efficient confrontation strategies helps improve the quality of social relations and come up with desirable social adjustment. Emotional management which is prominent in people with high EI can be utilised to organise emotions and prevent emotional crises. Emotional organisation of power, in addition to its prevention mechanism, improves the emotional adjustment in individuals (Engelberg & Sjoberg, 2004; Mousavi Lotfi et al., 2009). Regarding the relationship between EI and educational adjustment, the findings revealed that the highest frequency of students with high EI had a good emotional adjustment. In contrast, the highest frequency of students with low EI had a weak emotional adjustment. This highlights a significant relationship between EI and educational adjustment, and students with high EI have a better educational adjustment. This is similar to many studies that showed a positive relationship between EI and educational adjustment (Chong Abdullah, Elias, Mahyuddin & Uli, 2009; Marques et al., 2006; Petrides et al., 2004). Besharat et al. (2006) indicated 67% variance related to an educational adjustment in female students and 59% variance related to an educational adjustment in male students could be explained by EI. Finally, the study suggests a relationship between the participants' EI and their overall adjustment. This is in line with findings of a study by Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson and Pope (2007) who concluded that in comparison with low EI students, those with high EI face stressful situations in a more effective way, and show less destructive behaviour such as aggression, violence and cutting classes (also see Saklofske, Austin, Galloway and Davidson (2007)). Chan (2005) quotes Engelberg who explains that people with high EI have a better access to useful information and using this information to form their adjustment behaviour react more appropriately to their emotions. Based on the results of this study, it is recommend that emotional skills be incorporated into educational programmes at pre, elementary and high schools. At pre-school level, the emotional education can be provided using puppet shows, role plays and educational films to improve affective, social and interpersonal adaptations as early as childhood. Secondly, models of EI education for students should be designed and developed at various educational levels. Finally, due to limitations of the study, care should be taken in generalising the findings to other populations. A possible area for further research should compare the relationship between EI and adjustment in teenage girls and boys.

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors would like to express their gratitude to people in charge of the educational centres including school heads, consulting offices, staff and students and Ms. Fatemeh Javadi for editing the manuscript.

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**Table 1. Relative/absolute frequency distribution subjects, according to a demographic variable**

Percent	NO	Demographic variable
		Age
3	9	16
45/3	136	17
51/7	155	18
		Number members of living in a family
9	27	3
70/6	212	4–5
20/4	61	>5
		Fathers job
1/3	4	Worker
36/3	109	Personnel
47/3	142	Businessman

15	45	Others
		Mothers job
80	242	Homemaker
13	39	Personnel
7	21	Others
		Fathers graduation
2/3	7	I literate
12/7	38	Elementary -guidance
44/7	134	High school Diploma
1/7	121	University
		Mothers graduation
1/7	5	I literate
18	54	Elementary–guidance
57	171	Diploma high school
23/3	70	University
		Headmaster(legal guardian)
94/7	284	Father and mother
./3	1	Only father
5	15	Only mother
		Educational field
50	150	Mathematics
25	75	Experimental
25	75	Humanistic
		Pre-university centre
66/7	200	State-run
33/7	100	Private
		Grade point average
./3	1	<12
3/6	11	12–13/99
14/7	24	14–15/99
34/7	104	16–17/99
46/7	140	>18

**Table 2. Relative/absolute frequency distribution (percent) EI, emotional, social, instructional I and total adjustment**

Variable	No	Percent
Emotional adjustment		
Very good	17	5/7
Good	168	56
Moderate	47	15/7
Weak	43	14/3
Very weak	25	8/3
Social adjustment		
Very good	35	11/7
Good	73	24/3
Moderate	119	39/7
Weak	51	17
Very weak	22	7/3
Adjustment instructional		
Very good	46	15/3
Good	168	22/7



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Moderate	86	28/7
Weak	81	27
Very weak	19	6/3
Total adjustment		
Very good	3	1
Good	56	18/7
Moderate	117	39
Weak	69	23
Very weak	55	18/3
EI		
High	154	51/3
Low	146	48/7

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**Table 3. Relative/absolute frequency distribution subjects, according to levels of emotional adjustment**

Emotional adjustment and EI	Very good		Good		Moderate		Weak		Very weak		Total		Results exam
	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	
Low	4	1/3	56	18/7	24	8	38	12/7	24	8	146	48/7	$X^2 = 69/8$ Df = 4
High	13	4/3	112	37/3	23	7/7	5	1/7	1	.3	154	51/3	$P = .000$
Total	17	5/7	168	56	47	15/7	43	14/3	25	8/3	300	100	

**Table 4. Relative/absolute frequency distribution EI subjects according to level of social adjustment**

Social adjustment and EI	Very good		Good		Moderate		Weak		Very weak		Total		Results exam
	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	
Low	8	2/7	16	5/3	59	19/7	41	13/7	22	7/3	146	48/7	$X^2 = 74/03$ Df = 4
High	27	9	57	19	60	20	10	3/3	0	0	154	51/3	$P = .000$
Total	35	11/7	73	24/3	119	39/7	51	17	22	8/3	300	100	

**Table 5. Relative/absolute frequency distribution subjects according to the level of instructional adjustment**

Educational adjustment and EI	Very good		Good		Moderate		Weak		Very weak		Total		Results exam
	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	
Low	3	1	22	7/3	47	15/7	57	19	17	5/7	146	48/7	$X^2 = 69/12$ Df = 4
High	43	14/3	46	15/3	39	13	24	8	2	.7	154	51/3	$P = .000$
Total	46	15/3	68	22/7	86	28/7	81	27	19	6/3	300	100	

**Table 6. Relative/absolute frequency distribution subjects according to the level of total adjustment**

Total adjustment and EI	Very good		Good		Moderate		Weak		Very weak		Total		Results exam
	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent	
Low	0	0	7	2/3	38	12/7	49	12/7	52	17/3	146	48/7	$X^2 = 69/12$ Df = 4
High	3	1	49	16/3	79	26/3	20	26/3	3	1	154	51/3	$P = .000$
Total	3	1	56	18/7	117	39	69	39	55	18/3	300	100	