

Examining the role of emotional intelligence and age on career selection of college students

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Abstract

The process of career selection is one of the most critical and challenging phases for college students, particularly in India, where societal expectations and familial pressures often significantly influence decisions. This paper examines the role of emotional intelligence (EI)—a multidimensional construct that includes self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills—in shaping career choices among Indian college students. Emotional intelligence allows individuals to understand and manage their own emotions better, as well as empathize with the feelings of others. This ability is particularly important in a collectivist society like India. By evaluating how EI impacts decision-making processes, this paper highlights its significance in helping students navigate the often overwhelming landscape of career options available to them. The study integrates various theoretical frameworks, including Mayer and Salovey's model of emotional intelligence and Goleman's competencies, along with empirical research that indicates a positive correlation between high levels of EI and the ability to make informed, resilient, and personally fulfilling career decisions. Additionally, it considers the cultural context of India, emphasizing how emotional intelligence can be a crucial tool for aligning personal aspirations with family expectations and societal norms. Furthermore, the paper explores practical implications, suggesting that educational institutions can play a vital role in fostering emotional intelligence through workshops, counselling, and extracurricular activities. By enhancing EI, students may become better equipped to handle stress and uncertainty, leading to more thoughtful and satisfying career choices that resonate with their personal values and goals. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of prioritizing the development of emotional intelligence in career guidance programs to empower Indian college students in their professional journeys.

Keywords: Career selection, emotional intelligence, age, artistic aspect

1. Introduction

Career selection is a critical life decision that significantly impacts an individual's professional trajectory and psychological well-being. For Indian college students, this process is often complicated by a confluence of societal norms, economic considerations, and familial expectations. In today's rapidly evolving global economy, this choice has become increasingly complex due to the multitude of options, technological advancements, and societal pressures. For college students, balancing their interests, abilities, and external expectations often presents significant challenges. Several factors influence our career selection:

- a. **Personal Interests and Aptitudes:** A student's natural talents, hobbies, and passions play a significant role in determining career preferences.
- b. **Societal and Familial Expectations:** In many cultures, including India, societal norms and parental expectations heavily influence career choices. Fields like medicine, engineering, or government services are often considered prestigious, sometimes leading students to prioritize these over their aspirations.
- c. **Economic Considerations:** The promise of financial stability and lucrative job prospects often drives career selection. For many students, careers in technology, finance, or healthcare are appealing due to their economic potential.
- d. **Peer Influence:** Peers significantly affect decision-making, as students may feel compelled to follow popular trends or conform to the choices of their social circle.
- e. **Access to Information and Resources:** Exposure to career guidance, counseling, and internships can shape students' understanding of various fields and influence their decisions. Conversely, a lack of resources can limit awareness of available opportunities.

In this context, emotional intelligence serves as a valuable asset, enabling students to navigate these complexities effectively. emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and the emotions of others. It plays a critical role in guiding students toward fulfilling and well-informed career decisions. Introduced by psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990 and popularized by Daniel Goleman in 1995, emotional intelligence is now a cornerstone in understanding human behavior, relationships, and leadership.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a multifaceted concept that has been defined and measured through various models. These models provide frameworks for understanding how individuals recognize, manage, and apply emotional and social competencies. The three primary models of emotional intelligence are:

Ability Model

The Ability Model by Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) conceptualizes emotional intelligence as a form of intelligence that involves the processing of emotional information. According to this model, EI is the capacity to:

- Perceive Emotions: Recognizing emotions in oneself and others, as well as in objects, art, and stories.
- Use Emotions: Harnessing emotions to facilitate various cognitive processes, such as problem-solving and decision-making.
- Understand Emotions: Comprehending emotional language, including the ability to differentiate between similar emotions and understand how emotions evolve over time.
- Manage Emotions: Regulating emotions in oneself and others to achieve personal and social goals.

Mixed Model

The Mixed Model, popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995), combines emotional intelligence with traits like motivation, social skills, and personality attributes. Goleman's framework includes five core components:

1. Self-Awareness: Recognizing and understanding one's own emotions and their impact on others.
2. Self-Regulation: Controlling impulsive behaviours and emotions, and adapting to changing circumstances.
3. Motivation: Being driven by intrinsic goals rather than external rewards, and maintaining a positive attitude.
4. Empathy: Understanding and sharing the feelings of others, which is essential for building strong relationships.
5. Social Skills: Managing relationships effectively through communication, conflict resolution, and collaboration.

Trait Model

The Trait Model by K. V. Petrides and Adrian Furnham (2001) views emotional intelligence as a collection of emotional-related self-perceptions and behavioral dispositions. These traits are assessed through self-reported measures rather than objective tests.

Traits include:

- Emotional self-awareness.

- Assertiveness.
- Emotional regulation.
- Stress management.
- Social competence.

Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Career Selection

Career selection is a pivotal decision for college students, and emotional intelligence (EI) plays a significant role in shaping this decision-making process. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and influence emotions in oneself and others. This ability not only affects interpersonal relationships but also influences how individuals navigate their personal and professional lives. The relationship between emotional intelligence and career selection is multifaceted and can impact the alignment of career choices with personal values, goals, and strengths.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has gained significant attention as a key factor influencing personal and professional success. In particular, emotional intelligence plays an important role in the process of career selection, helping individuals align their skills, values, and goals with suitable professional paths. Emotional intelligence—comprising self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. It helps students and professionals navigate this process and select careers that are emotionally and professionally fulfilling.

. A study by Schutte et al. (2001) found that self-awareness and emotional regulation were associated with better decision-making and problem-solving abilities, which are crucial when selecting a career. Self-aware individuals are able to assess their own preferences and avoid pursuing careers simply because of external pressures or expectations. They make more informed and autonomous decisions, which leads to a better alignment between their emotional needs and career goals (Schutte, et al., 2001).

Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) proposed that emotional regulation allows individuals to remain composed in stressful career decisions and handle challenges such as rejection or uncertainty. Their study suggested that emotional regulation helps individuals stay adaptable and resilient in the face of career setbacks, such as job rejections or difficult career transitions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004).

Empathy allows individuals to understand the emotional and social needs of others, which can guide decisions about careers that require strong social interaction, such as teaching, counselling, or healthcare. Goleman (1998) emphasizes that empathy is a cornerstone of effective leadership and social functioning. In the context of career selection, empathy helps students understand which careers align with their values of helping others or contributing to social causes (Goleman, 1998).

Social skills, another key component of emotional intelligence, play a significant role in career navigation. Effective communication, networking, and teamwork are essential for advancing in most career paths. A high level of emotional intelligence enables individuals to form strong professional relationships, which can be a major advantage when selecting and progressing in a career. Bar-On (2006) found that social skills—such as communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution. These were positively associated with career success and satisfaction.

According to Deci and Ryan (1985), intrinsic motivation is a key driver of career satisfaction and long-term success. Emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to select careers that bring them personal fulfilment, rather than solely focusing on financial rewards or prestige (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

2. Review of Literature

The relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and career choice has been the focus of several studies across various academic disciplines. Emotional intelligence, which involves the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions, as well as the emotions of others, has been shown to have a significant influence on career decision-making, career satisfaction, and overall professional success. This review explores the literature on how emotional intelligence affects career choices, decision-making processes, and career success, focusing on key studies and their findings.

One of the primary ways in which emotional intelligence influences career choices is through its impact on decision-making processes. Studies have shown that individuals with high emotional intelligence are more capable of making informed, thoughtful career decisions that align with their strengths, values, and long-term goals.

Several studies have examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and career satisfaction. Emotional intelligence has been shown to play a significant role in job performance, interpersonal relationships, and stress management—all factors that directly contribute to career satisfaction.

Bar-On (2006), in his research on emotional-social intelligence (ESI), found that individuals with high EI tend to experience greater job satisfaction due to their ability to handle workplace stress, communicate effectively with colleagues, and build supportive professional relationships. These interpersonal skills, in turn, lead to higher career satisfaction. The ability to regulate one's emotions and stay motivated is also linked to perseverance and achieving long-term career goals, which further enhances job satisfaction.

Moreover, Mayer et al. (2004) indicated that emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to choose careers that align with their emotional and social needs. Careers that involve social interaction, helping others, or leadership roles are often chosen by individuals with high EI, as these careers allow them to utilize their emotional skills and contribute meaningfully to society.

Cherniss (2000) and Goleman (1998) both concluded that emotional intelligence is a better predictor of career success than traditional measures of intelligence (IQ), especially in roles that involve leadership, teamwork, or customer service. In particular, Goleman (1998) found that leaders with high EI are better at building trust, fostering collaboration, and managing conflict—skills that are crucial for success in managerial roles and, by extension, for career advancement.

Sy et al. (2006) explored the role of EI in leadership and found that individuals with high emotional intelligence are more likely to succeed in leadership roles, which in turn can lead to greater career progression. Their findings suggest that EI plays a crucial role in determining the success of individuals in high-pressure, high-responsibility positions.

Di Fabio and Palazzeschi (2009) demonstrated that individuals with high EI are more likely to engage in thorough career exploration, assessing not only their professional interests but also their emotional alignment with potential careers. This exploration process, driven by emotional intelligence, leads to more well-rounded and sustainable career choices. Moreover, Petrides et al. (2004) argued that EI influences career stability and adaptation. Individuals with high EI tend to make better career transitions, whether it be changing fields, adjusting to new job demands, or responding to shifts in the job market. Their ability to understand and manage emotions during these transitions contributes to their resilience and success in adapting to new professional environments.

Some research has also focused on the interaction between emotional intelligence and gender in the context of career selection. Extant literature suggests that women, on average, tend to score higher on emotional intelligence measures, particularly in the domains of empathy and social skills (Brackett et al., 2006). As a result, women may be more likely to pursue careers that involve high levels of interpersonal interaction and emotional labor, such as teaching, counseling, or nursing. MacCann et al. (2011) found that training in emotional intelligence can significantly improve career decision-making and job satisfaction. By enhancing emotional skills, these programs help individuals better understand their emotional responses to career-related stress and navigate challenges more effectively. This is particularly useful in environments where career choices must be made quickly or under pressure.

The literature on emotional intelligence and career selection emphasizes the critical role EI plays in shaping individuals' career choices and their long-term success. High emotional intelligence allows individuals to make well-informed, balanced career decisions that align with their personal values, abilities, and emotional needs. Moreover, EI contributes to career satisfaction and success by enabling individuals to manage emotions, communicate effectively, build relationships, and adapt to changing professional environments.

Research Objectives:

The present research has been conducted to meet the following objectives:

- a. To assess the relationship between emotional intelligence and career selection.
- b. To assess the effect of age on career selection

3. Methodology

Sample

A total of 199 students were selected as participants of the study in Darbhanga, Bihar using purposive-cum-incidental sampling method. Where 89 students were male and the remaining 110 participants were female. The mean age of the sample was 23.3769 (standard deviation 1.975). The range of the age of the participants was 10 (30 and 20 were their maximum and minimum ages). 0.85 and 0.9 were the skewness and kurtosis.

Measures

The research utilised a scale that was designed by Gottfredson and John Holland (1991) in order to evaluate the respondents' preferences on their chosen line of work. Holland's theory of vocational personalities, which proposes that individuals' profession choices coincide with their personality characteristics and interests, serves as the foundation for this scale. That idea was developed in the 1960s. A total of 18 items are included in the scale, which is aimed to assess six distinct personality types related to vocation. The following are the dimensions that make up this framework: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, entrepreneurial, and conventional. By providing a thorough framework for analysing how respondents connect their professional interests with their personality traits, the scale makes it possible to gain an in-depth understanding of vocational inclinations across a variety of dimensions.

4. Result and discussion

Emotional Intelligence and Career Selection

In order to test the first hypothesis regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and career selection of the students a Pearson coefficient of correlation was calculated between emotional intelligence and career selection. Six dimensions of emotional intelligence and six dimensions of career selection were taken into account. The six dimensions of emotional intelligence are Positive Affect, Other's Emotion, Happiness Emotion, Self Emotions, Non-verbal Emotion, and Management of Emotion. Whereas, Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional were the six dimensions of career selection. The correlation coefficients between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and dimensions of career selection have been reflected in Table 1.

Table 1: Showing correlation coefficients between emotional intelligence and career selection

	Positive Affect	Emotion Others	Happy Emotion	Emotion Own	Non-verbal Emotion	Emotional Management
Realistic	.129	.154*	.286**	.171*	.223**	.131

Investigative	.133	.307**	.187**	.143*	.236**	.115
Artistic	.132	.321**	.225**	.216**	.203**	.182*
Social	.317**	.323**	.204**	.172*	.225**	.117
Enterprising	.128	.245**	.199**	.081	.280**	.133
Conventional	.246**	.239**	.253**	.233**	.291**	.055

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

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows that the realistic aspect of career selection is positively associated with the emotion others (0.154), happy emotions (0.286), emotion own (0.171) and non-verbal emotions (0.223). The two correlations namely with emotional others and emotion own are statistically significant at 0.05. Whereas, other two associations, with happy emotion and non-verbal emotion are significant at 0.01. The two relationships, between the realistic aspect of career selection and positive affect of emotional intelligence and between the realistic aspect of career selection and emotional management are not significant.

In the case of the relationship between the investigative aspect of career selection and dimensions of emotional intelligence, the four dimensions of emotional intelligence such as emotion others (0.307), happy emotion (0.187), emotion own (0.143), and non-verbal emotion (0.236) are significantly related. Amongst these significant correlations, the only one, emotion own is significant at 0.05 level. The other three associations are significant at 0.01 level.

The artistic aspect of career selection is significantly related to all dimensions of emotional intelligence except one: positive affect. The correlation coefficients between the artistic aspect of career selection and emotion others (0.321), happy emotion (0.225), emotion own (0.216), non-verbal emotion (0.203), and emotional management (0.182) are statistically significant either at 0.05 or 0.01 level. Among these five correlations, four are significant at 0.01, and the fifth, namely emotional management, is significant at 0.05 level.

The social aspect of career selection is significantly related to all dimensions of emotional intelligence excluding emotional management. The correlation coefficients between the artistic aspect of career selection and emotion others (0.321), happy emotion (0.225), emotion own (0.216), non-verbal emotion (0.203), and emotional management (0.182) are statistically significant either at 0.05 or 0.01 level. Among these five correlations, four are significant at 0.01, and the fifth, namely emotional management, is significant at 0.05 level.

With regard to the enterprising aspect of career selection, its relationship with three dimensions of emotional intelligence namely, emotion others (0.245), happy emotion (0.199), and non-verbal emotion (0.280) are statistically significant at 0.01.

Interestingly, the last aspect of career selection, conventional, is significantly correlated with all dimensions of emotional intelligence, excluding Emotional Management at 0.01. The conventional aspect of career selection is significantly associated with positive affect (0.246), emotion others (0.239), happy emotion (0.253), emotion own (0.233), and non-verbal emotion (0.291).

Effect of age on career selection

Several t-tests were calculated to measure the significance of the mean difference between two groups of participants separated based on their ages. In other words, a t-test was used to assess the effect of participants' age on their career selection. At first, two groups (i.e., lower age and middle age) were compared for each aspect of career selection, one by one. After that, lower and higher age groups were compared. Then, the last, middle age group, was compared with higher age group participants. If the t-ratio was found to be significant, it would mean that the difference in the aspects of career selection is due to their age. Three tables (from Tables 2 to 4) recorded the findings of t-ratios.

Table 2: Showing the difference between lower age and middle age in career selection

Career Selection	Age	N	Mean	Mean diff.	Std. Deviation	t-ratio	Sig.
Realistic	Lower Age	114	4.9386	0.1349	1.24293	.723	.471
	Middle Age	68	5.0735		1.17583		
Investigative	Lower Age	115	5.5217	0.2724	1.42870	1.284	.201
	Middle Age	68	5.7941		1.31079		
Artistic	Lower Age	114	5.2368	0.0132	1.45920	.056	.955
	Middle Age	68	5.2500		1.63337		
Social	Lower Age	115	6.0435	0.0447	1.23111	.252	.806
	Middle Age	68	6.0882		1.11617		
Enterprising	Lower Age	112	5.3125	0.195	1.55402	.874	.398
	Middle Age	67	5.5075		1.37481		
Conventional	Lower Age	115	5.0609	0.1744	1.14161	1.033	.310
	Middle Age	68	5.2353		1.08060		

Table 2 shows that no mean difference between the lower age group and the middle age group of the participants on account of the aspects of career selection is statistically significant. This signals that there is no difference between the participants of lower age group and middle age group in terms of neither aspects of career selection.

Table 3: Showing the difference between lower age and higher age in career selection

Career Selection	Age	N	Mean	Mean diff.	Std. Deviation	t-ratio	Sig.
Realistic	Lower Age	114	4.9386	0.0011	1.24293	.003	.997
	Higher Age	16	4.9375		1.61116		

Investigative	Lower Age	115	5.5217	0.1033	1.42870	.271	.787
	Higher Age	16	5.6250		1.40831		
Artistic	Lower Age	114	5.2368	1.2993	1.45920	3.247	.001
	Higher Age	16	3.9375		1.76895		
Social	Lower Age	115	6.0435	0.0435	1.23111	.133	.894
	Higher Age	16	6.0000		1.15470		
Enterprising	Lower Age	112	5.3125	0.3125	1.55402	.741	.460
	Higher Age	16	5.0000		1.75119		
Conventional	Lower Age	115	5.0609	0.2484	1.14161	.818	.415
	Higher Age	16	4.8125		1.10868		

Table 3 reveals that only the artistic aspect of career selection differs due to the age of the participants. The lower age group has a higher mean score (5.2368) for the artistic aspect of career selection than that of the higher age group (3.9375). The mean difference (1.2993) for this artistic aspect of career selection is statistically significant (at 0.001). This states that participants of lower age have a high artistic inclination in their career selection behavior compared to the higher age group. This might be because young students are not so much aware of the realities or difficulties of life, and hence they pursue artistic orientation in their career selection. On the contrary, older participants might choose a pragmatic career. Age has a significant effect on the artistic aspect of career selection. As far as other aspects of career selection are concerned, they are similar for lower-age and higher-age participants.

Table 4: Showing the difference between middle age and higher age in career selection

	Age	N	Mean	Mean diff	Std. Deviation	t-ratio	Sig.
Realistic	Middle Age	68	5.0735	0.136	1.17583	.386	.700
	Higher Age	16	4.9375		1.61116		
Investigative	Middle Age	68	5.7941	0.1691	1.31079	.458	.648
	Higher Age	16	5.6250		1.40831		
Artistic	Middle Age	68	5.2500	1.3125	1.63337	2.847	.006
	Higher Age	16	3.9375		1.76895		
Social	Middle Age	68	6.0882	0.0882	1.11617	.283	.778
	Higher Age	16	6.0000		1.15470		
Enterprising	Middle Age	67	5.5075	0.5075	1.37481	1.256	.213
	Higher Age	16	5.0000		1.75119		
Conventional	Middle Age	68	5.2353	0.4228	1.08060	1.401	.165
	Higher Age	16	4.8125		1.10868		

Similarly, table 4 reflects that only the artistic aspect of career selection differs due to the age of the participants. The middle age group has a higher mean score (5.2500) for the artistic aspect of career selection than that of the higher age group (3.9375). The mean difference (1.3125) for this artistic aspect of career selection is statistically significant (at 0.006). This states that participants of middle age have a high artistic inclination in their career selection

behavior compared to the higher age group. This might be because young students are not so much aware of the realities or difficulties of life, and hence, they pursue artistic orientation in their career selection. On the contrary, older participants might choose a pragmatic career. Age has a significant effect on the artistic aspect of career selection. Regarding other aspects of career selection, they are similar for middle-aged and higher-age participants.

It is evidently clear that among all five aspects of career selection, age has only a significant effect on the artistic aspect of career selection. Young participants have a higher inclination for artistic orientation in career selection than the old ones. Not only that but as the age of the participants increase their inclination toward artistic aspect of career selection behaviour decreases.

5. Conclusion

The following two conclusions can be drawn from the present piece of research:

1. Most of the aspects of career selection behavior are positively correlated with dimensions of emotional intelligence.
2. Only the artistic aspect of the career selection behavior is influenced by the age of the participants. The younger the participants, the more artistic inclination is noticed in their career selection.

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