



Emotional Competence among Scheduled Tribe Students: Enhancing Social and Academic Development

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ABSTRACT

This study explores emotional competence among Scheduled Tribe students in Eklavya Model Residential school (EMRS) through in-depth qualitative interviews with 85 students from the Rajasthan (State of India). The research focuses on four domains: emotional perception, regulation, facilitation and understanding. Students demonstrated strong emotional awareness, recognizing and interpreting emotions in themselves and others. They effectively used emotions to facilitate academic tasks, managed emotional challenges, and helped peers to handle the emotional difficulties. The findings emphasize the significance of emotional intelligence in maintaining positive social relationships, academic success, and emotional well-being. These results underscore the need for targeted emotional and social learning interventions in educational settings, particularly in culturally diverse contexts, to enhance emotional competencies and promote community cohesion among marginalized groups.

Introduction

Emotional competence, often closely associated with emotional intelligence (EI), is an essential factor in Social Emotional Learning as well as in personal, social and academic development. Emotional competence refers to an individual's ability to accurately perceive, express, understand, and manage emotions—both their own and those of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This concept is grounded in the broader framework of emotional intelligence, which emphasizes the role of emotions in cognitive processes, decision-making, and interpersonal interactions. In the context of education, emotional competence plays a critical role in enhancing students' social skills, academic performance, and overall well-being (Goleman, 1995). For students, particularly those in challenging educational settings, emotional competence is a cornerstone for overcoming obstacles and succeeding. Research has demonstrated that students with high emotional competence tend to experience better social interactions, improved coping mechanisms, and higher academic achievement (Parker et al., 2004). However, the significance of emotional competence is often overlooked, especially among marginalized groups such as Scheduled Tribe (ST) students, who may face additional challenges in both the classroom and the community. Scheduled Tribe students in India represent a significant segment of the population but are often disadvantaged in terms of access to quality education and social support systems. These students frequently live in remote areas where educational infrastructure is limited and face barriers related to poverty, social exclusion, and cultural isolation (Ghosh, 2013). Moreover, Eklavya Model residential schools (EMRS), which serve as the primary educational institutions for ST students. In these settings, the development of emotional competence becomes even more crucial, as it could help students navigate the emotional and social challenges they face while fostering academic success. In addition to the educational barriers, ST students may experience a disconnect between their cultural identity and the mainstream education system. The emotional struggles stemming from this cultural gap—such as feelings of isolation, identity confusion, or frustration—may be compounded by the lack of emotional awareness and regulation skills (Pillai & Sengupta, 2017). Therefore, enhancing emotional competence among Scheduled Tribe students is not only a tool for academic success but also a means to bridge this cultural and emotional gap. Understanding and developing emotional intelligence may help these students better manage stress, build stronger relationships with peers and teachers, and improve their overall sense of self-worth. As emotional intelligence has gained increasing recognition in the educational field, the need for targeted interventions for underprivileged and marginalized student groups, such as ST students, becomes more apparent. Despite the growing body of research on emotional competence, studies focusing on its relevance to tribal populations remain limited. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the emotional

competencies of Scheduled Tribe students in Eklavya Model residential schools (EMRS) and examining how emotional intelligence affects their social and academic outcomes.

The primary aim of this paper is to explore the emotional competence of Scheduled Tribe students in Eklavya Model residential schools (EMRS) and to understand how this competence impacts their social and academic development. Emotional competence, as defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990), includes four key components: perception of emotions, emotional facilitation, understanding emotions, and the management of emotions. This study seeks to examine each of these components in the context of tribal students' lived experiences, using their narratives to gain insights into how emotional intelligence is manifested and its role in their daily lives.

Concept of Emotional Competence and Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional competence refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, express, and manage emotions in a way that enhances personal well-being and social interactions (Sharma, 1994). In its broadest sense, emotional competence encompasses a range of emotional skills and behaviors that contribute to social success, personal development, and cognitive functioning. The concept is rooted in the broader framework of Emotional Intelligence (EI), a term popularized by Salovey and Mayer (1990), who define EI as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and use emotions effectively in oneself and others. Emotional competence, in essence, is the practical manifestation of emotional intelligence.

Salovey and Mayer's model of emotional intelligence is central to understanding the multifaceted nature of emotional competence. They proposed that emotional intelligence is composed of four key components:

1. Perception of Emotions: This involves the ability to recognize and accurately identify emotions in oneself and others. It encompasses both facial expressions and non-verbal cues, such as body language and tone of voice, that indicate emotional states. For instance, a student's ability to identify when a peer is feeling anxious or sad can influence how they respond to that individual. Perception is considered the foundational skill in emotional intelligence because it informs all other aspects of EI.

2. Emotional Facilitation: Emotions play a critical role in guiding cognitive processes such as thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving. Emotional facilitation involves using emotions to prioritize thinking, focus attention, and enhance decision-making. For example, a student feeling excited or motivated about a particular subject may be more likely to engage deeply with the material, thereby facilitating better learning outcomes. This component highlights the connection between emotions and cognition, where emotional states enhance or hinder cognitive abilities.

3. Understanding Emotions: This component involves the ability to comprehend emotional information, including the causes, nuances, and variations of emotions. Emotionally intelligent individuals can recognize how different emotions relate to one another and how they evolve over time. This understanding allows individuals to anticipate emotional shifts, making it easier to manage interpersonal relationships or resolve conflicts. For example, a student might recognize that their frustration with a class assignment is linked to a fear of failure, and this insight could prompt them to seek support or devise strategies to manage their anxiety.

4. Management of Emotions: Emotional regulation is the ability to manage and modulate one's emotions to achieve a desired outcome. It also includes the ability to influence the emotional states of others, such as calming an upset peer or motivating a team during a challenging task. Effective emotional management allows individuals to maintain emotional balance in stressful situations, avoid impulsive behaviors, and engage in adaptive coping strategies. For students, this might manifest as managing stress during exams, resolving conflicts with classmates, or maintaining focus during difficult classroom activities.

These four components work in tandem to create a holistic understanding of emotional competence. Together, they allow individuals to navigate both their internal emotional experiences and external social interactions, leading to better emotional and social outcomes (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Emotional Competence in Educational Contexts

The aim of education will not only be cognitive development, but also building character and creating holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st century skills (NEP, pp 13, para 4.4). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates for a comprehensive and transformative educational experience, emphasizing the imperative to fortify emotional skills throughout students' academic journeys. Further the NEP advocates for a holistic and multidisciplinary education that aims to develop all capacities of human beings, including the emotional aspect, in an integrated manner (NEP, 2020, p 36). As NEP 2020 introduces the pedagogical and curricular structure, the integration of affective aspects and related skills among students becomes an important agenda of education. The policy emphasizes that teachers, through innovative approaches, contribute significantly to the socio-emotional learning crucial for a student's development. This research aligns with the NEP's vision by exploring how emotional competencies contribute to cognitive abilities, critical thinking, and relationship-building skills among secondary stage students).

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE 2023) takes this vision forward by emphasizing the role of emotional development, regulation, and support for students at different stages of

their education. It acknowledges that a safe and emotionally secure classroom environment, built on positive relationships and trust, can enhance students' learning experiences (NCF-SE 2023, Section 3.3.1, pp. 68-69). The framework highlights the role of teachers in creating a safe and caring environment that fosters emotional growth and well-being (NCF-SE 2023, pp. 77-81; 572-573).

The significance of emotional competence in psychological stages of life has been demonstrated in various studies. Emotional Competence alludes to the appearance of genuinely skilled practices that reflect Emotional Intelligence (Seal et al. 2010). According to Sharma (1994) "Emotional competence refers to a person's ability to express or release his/her inner feelings and emotions. It implies an ease around others and determines our ability to effectively and successfully lead and express". Through childhood and adolescence, youngsters are learning how to express and regulate their myriad feelings and understand the emotions of self and others. They are acquiring emotional competence. Specifically, emotional competence is the ability to purposefully and fully experience and express a variety of emotions, regulate emotional expressiveness and experience when necessary, and understand the emotions of self and others. These skills, as they develop through childhood and adolescence, support successful resolution of developmental tasks centering upon social and academic success. Numerous studies have shown that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to perform better academically, exhibit greater social skills, and experience fewer behavioral problems. Emotional intelligence affects a range of academic outcomes, such as motivation, concentration, problem-solving skills, and perseverance (Parker et al., 2004). For example, students who can effectively manage their emotions in high-stress situations—such as during exams or group projects—are more likely to succeed in their academic endeavors.

The role of emotional competence becomes even more significant for students from diverse or marginalized backgrounds, such as Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in India. These students often face additional challenges in terms of socio-economic disadvantages, cultural isolation, and a lack of educational resources (Ghosh, 2013). Research has suggested that marginalized students can benefit significantly from emotional competence training, as it can help them develop the resilience needed to cope with academic challenges and social exclusion (Seligman et al., 2009).

For example, a study by Zeidner, Matthews, and Roberts (2009) found that emotional intelligence was a strong predictor of academic performance in students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Emotional intelligence was associated with better stress management, higher motivation, and improved self-regulation, all of which contribute to higher academic achievement. Similarly, EI has been linked to improved interpersonal relationships, which are essential for students from marginalized communities who may feel isolated in educational settings.

In the case of ST students in Eklavya Model residential schools (EMRS), emotional competence could help address some of the social challenges they face. These students may experience a disconnect between their indigenous cultural practices and the mainstream education system, which can lead to feelings of alienation, low self-esteem, or frustration (Pillai & Sengupta, 2017). Emotional intelligence can help these students navigate their emotions in such challenging contexts, fostering greater social integration and helping them build positive relationships with peers and teachers.

However, despite its potential benefits, the emotional competence of ST students in Eklavya Model residential schools (EMRS), remains underexplored in academic literature. This gap presents a unique opportunity for further research, especially in the context of improving both educational outcomes and the emotional well-being of tribal students.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Tribal Education

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has gained significant attention in recent years as an effective framework for promoting emotional competence in educational settings. SEL programs aim to help students develop five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). These competencies align closely with the components of emotional intelligence outlined by Salovey and Mayer, emphasizing the development of both emotional skills and social skills necessary for personal success and interpersonal harmony.

In tribal education, where students may face additional challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and limited access to support systems, SEL programs can be particularly impactful. SEL can help tribal students develop the emotional and social skills required to thrive in an academic environment, which is often shaped by dominant cultural norms that may differ from their own (Sukumar, 2018). By promoting empathy, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication, SEL programs can support ST students in developing stronger social connections and better coping strategies in their academic lives.

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of SEL programs in improving the emotional competence of students in marginalized communities. For example, a study by Taylor et al. (2017) found that students who participated in SEL programs showed improvements in academic achievement, social behavior, and emotional regulation. Additionally, these students demonstrated a greater sense of belonging in the school environment, which is particularly crucial for tribal students who may otherwise feel disconnected from the mainstream education system.

The relevance of SEL in tribal education is particularly evident in the context of Eklavya Model residential schools (EMRS), where students from remote areas live and study away from their families. These schools often serve as a vital space for cultural exchange and social development. Implementing SEL programs in such settings can provide students with tools to navigate complex emotional and social dynamics, from dealing with homesickness to understanding and managing peer relationships. Moreover, SEL programs can help educators better understand the emotional and social needs of their students, thereby creating a more supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Incorporating SEL into tribal education programs offers an opportunity to foster emotional competence among students while simultaneously promoting their academic success and social well-being. Given the unique challenges faced by Scheduled Tribe students, emotional intelligence and SEL programs can play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between academic performance and emotional resilience, ultimately empowering tribal students to succeed in both their educational and social endeavors.

IV. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the emotional competence of Scheduled Tribe students in Eklavya Model residential schools (EMRS). This approach was chosen because qualitative methods allow for an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences, particularly when studying nuanced constructs like emotional competence. The primary data collection method involved semi-structured interviews, enabling a flexible yet focused discussion around students' emotional experiences and competencies. This design was suitable for understanding how the students recognize, understand, and regulate their emotions, as well as how they perceive and react to the emotions of others. The participants were 85 Scheduled Tribe students enrolled in Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) from the state of India i.e. Rajasthan. The students were aged between 14 to 18 years, representing a critical developmental phase in adolescence when emotional competencies such as emotional regulation, self-awareness, and empathy are forming. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were designed to encourage deep reflection on emotional experiences. The interviews focused on four primary domains: Perception of Emotions, Emotional Facilitation, Understanding Emotions, and Management of Emotions. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in responses. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method suitable for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. Thematic analysis allows for a detailed examination of the emotional competencies described by the students and provides a flexible approach to interpreting the complexities of their emotional experiences. The findings were categorized according to the four key domains: Perception of Emotions, Emotional Facilitation, Understanding Emotions, and Management of Emotions, each reflecting specific patterns in students' emotional competencies.

V. Results and Discussion

A. Perception of Emotions

The students showed a strong emotional awareness regarding how they identify and interpret emotions, both in themselves and others. Their emotional perception skills were evident in their ability to recognize signs of sadness, anger, or happiness in family members, friends, and classmates. This ability to decode emotional signals, such as facial expressions, voice tone, and body language, reflects their deep awareness of emotional states, a crucial aspect of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

1. *"When my father is upset, I can see that he is sad by the way he talks less and his face looks tired. I always try to ask him what's wrong, even though he doesn't tell me. But I, along with my siblings, do something to make him smile, like singing his favorite song or doing something fun."* — Student
2. *"I can tell when my friend is angry because her tone changes and her hands start shaking. I always make sure to talk to her and ask her if something is bothering her."* — Student
3. *"When I see my friend looking distracted or upset in class, I try to understand what happened. I ask them if they want to talk and offer support. If they don't want to share, I give them space."* — Student

These narratives highlight how emotional perception facilitates empathy and supportive behavior, making it easier for students to connect with others. The ability to recognize emotions early and respond appropriately fosters emotional harmony within their social circles. Such skills are important for effective conflict resolution and the promotion of positive peer interactions. As seen in the students' reflections, cultural expectations in Scheduled Tribe communities, which often emphasize community interdependence, align well with the ability to perceive and respond to emotional cues in ways that build social cohesion.

B. Emotional Facilitation and Academic Impact

Students also demonstrated a strong ability to use their emotions for academic success. They reported using positive emotions like confidence and motivation to concentrate during studies and navigate stressful situations, such as exams. This indicates that emotional states are not only recognized but strategically harnessed for academic performance and problem-solving.

1. *"When I feel nervous before a test, I remind myself to focus on the task at hand, not the result. I calm my mind by taking deep breaths and telling myself that I've prepared enough."* — Student
2. *"If I feel frustrated with a problem, I take a break and return to it later. That way, my mind feels fresher, and I can solve the problem with more clarity."* — Student
3. *"When I feel anxious about an assignment, I break it into smaller tasks. It helps me focus on each part rather than getting overwhelmed by the whole thing."* — Student

These examples reflect emotion regulation strategies that allow students to convert negative emotions into positive academic outcomes. Emotional facilitation, as described by students, enables them to transform anxiety into focus and frustration into motivation, demonstrating a high level of self-regulation (Gross, 2002). When students can manage their emotional states effectively, they can enhance their cognitive processes, thereby boosting academic performance. This skill is essential in stressful academic settings, where emotional regulation can be the difference between success and failure.

C. Understanding Emotions

Students exhibited strong emotional insight, as they not only recognized their emotions but also reflected on the emotions of others. They were capable of understanding why someone felt a certain way and what actions they could take to respond helpfully. This reflective emotional understanding is crucial in both social and academic settings.

1. *"When my friend seems upset, I think about what might have caused it. I don't rush to conclusions but ask them if they want to talk about it, and if they do, I listen patiently and try to help them understand their feelings."* — Student
2. *"I sometimes feel sad when I miss my family. I understand that feeling because my friend also gets sad when she is away from her family, so we support each other and talk about it until we feel better."* — Student
3. *"When my classmate is upset with me, I think about what I might have done to hurt them. I apologize and try to make up for it, because I know it's important to understand their feelings and resolve the issue."* — Student

The ability to reflect on the emotional root causes helps students understand themselves and others better. This emotional understanding plays a key role in resolving conflicts, promoting social cooperation, and building stronger peer relationships. It also helps students be more self-aware, which contributes to academic resilience and effective social engagement. The findings suggest that fostering emotional literacy and reflective thinking can help students navigate complex emotional landscapes and maintain strong social networks.

D. Management of Emotions

An interesting finding was how students managed their own emotions and helped others manage theirs. Whether it was through deep breathing, talking it out, or giving emotional support, students demonstrated strong emotional regulation skills. Many shared how they used these skills to navigate academic pressures, help peers cope with difficult emotions, and maintain social harmony in their communities.

1. *"When I get angry with someone, I take deep breaths and count to ten. If I feel too frustrated, I walk away to cool down and then talk to the person calmly."* — Student
2. *"When my friend feels sad, I sit with her, ask what's bothering her, and listen without judging. Sometimes, I tell jokes to lighten her mood or we do something fun together to help her forget her worries."* — Student
3. *"When my classmate is frustrated with a task, I help him break it down into smaller parts. I encourage him and tell him that it's okay to feel frustrated, but we can solve the problem together."* — Student

These narratives demonstrate how emotional regulation and support can mitigate negative emotions, promoting social harmony and academic focus. The ability to manage one's own emotions and help others through emotional support is central to creating a positive school environment and building a resilient student community (Gross, 2002). This emotional competence is particularly important in residential school settings, where students often face emotional challenges due to homesickness and peer dynamics. Emotional management fosters a sense of security and belonging, which is critical for personal development.

Conclusion:

The data reveals that Scheduled Tribe students possess strong emotional competence, particularly in the areas of emotional perception, facilitation, understanding, and management. These skills are foundational to their academic success and social relationships, and they use their emotions effectively to navigate challenges. The students demonstrated a capacity to regulate emotions, help peers, and reflect on emotional experiences, which are all essential skills for fostering a positive school environment and promoting personal well-being. The findings suggest that continued emotional intelligence training and support can further enhance students' ability to manage emotions and overcome challenges in both academic and social contexts.

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