

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF STUDENTS AT NANCHANG VOCATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate overall emotional intelligence and the levels of personal and social ability among students at Nanchang Vocational University, and to compare emotional intelligence across student groups classified by gender, age, living situation, family monthly income, and grade point average. A quantitative research design was adopted, and data were collected from 600 students using a questionnaire on emotional intelligence. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the overall and dimensional levels of emotional intelligence, while inferential statistics were used to compare differences among demographic and academic groups. The findings showed that students had a high level of emotional intelligence overall, with high scores in both personal and social abilities. The results also indicated statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence according to gender, age, living situation, family monthly income, and GPA. These findings suggest that vocational universities should strengthen emotional intelligence education, counselling services, and student development programs by considering students' demographic, family, and academic characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing technological, economic, and socio-cultural environment, intellectual intelligence alone is no longer sufficient to cope with academic, social, and workplace challenges. Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and manage one's own emotions as well as those of others, has gained increasing attention in educational and psychological research. In the context of vocational education in China, students face unique pressures including academic stress, societal perceptions, family expectations, and career uncertainty. The Chinese government has emphasized the psychological well-being of college students, yet few institutions systematically assess EI (Li et al., 2022). Post-pandemic challenges, digital social changes, and limited face-to-face interaction further highlight the importance of developing emotional competencies (Zhou & Wang, 2021). At Nanchang Vocational University, preliminary observations suggest that many students experience difficulties in self-awareness, emotion regulation, motivation, and interpersonal skills, which negatively impact academic performance, personal growth, and future employability. Systematic assessment and promotion of emotional intelligence in vocational institutions are therefore urgent, as enhanced EI can improve students' mental well-being,

decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and readiness for professional life (Wang & Liu, 2022). This study aims to investigate the

emotional intelligence of students at Nanchang Vocational University to provide evidence-based insights for curriculum design, counselling services, and student development strategies.

For all the reasons mentioned above, the researcher is interested in conducting a research study on "Emotional Intelligence of Students at Nanchang Vocational University." This study provides an important opportunity to analyse and reflect on the emotional intelligence of vocational university students in China. This target group has received less in-depth study than students in general universities. The results of this study will make important contributions to planning student development strategies at Nanchang Vocational University. They may serve as a model for other vocational universities in China and other countries with similar contexts.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the overall emotional intelligence level and the levels in each aspect, namely personal ability and social ability, of students at Nanchang Vocational University.

2. To compare the differences in overall emotional intelligence and in each aspect (personal ability and social ability) of Nanchang Vocational University students categorized by gender, age, residential status, average monthly family income, and cumulative grade point average (GPA).

Research Questions

2. How does the emotional intelligence of students at Nanchang Vocational University, classified by gender, age, living situation, family's monthly income, and grade point average (GPA) different overall and in each aspect of Personal Ability and Social Ability?

2. How does the emotional intelligence of students at Nanchang Vocational University classified by gender, age, living situation, family's monthly income, grade point average (GPA) different overall and in each aspect?

Research Hypotheses

1. To study the level of overall and in each aspect of emotional intelligence of students at Nanchang Vocational University.

Therefore, hypothesis H1: The overall and in each aspect of emotional intelligence of students at Nanchang Vocational University have a high level.

2. To compare the emotional intelligence of students at Nanchang Vocational University classified by gender, age, living situation, family's monthly income, and grade point average (GPA). Therefore, the hypothesis is as follows:

H2a: Students at Nanchang Vocational University differ by gender in overall emotional intelligence and in each aspect of emotional intelligence.

H2b: Students at Nanchang Vocational University of different ages differ in overall emotional intelligence and in each aspect of emotional intelligence.

H2c: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different living situations differ in overall emotional intelligence and in each aspect of emotional intelligence.

H2d: The students of Nanchang Vocational University with different family monthly income have different overall and in each aspect of emotional intelligence.

H2e: The students of Nanchang Vocational University with different grade point average (GPA) have different overall and in each aspect of emotional intelligence.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Intelligence

Recent research distinguishes between ability emotional intelligence (EI) and trait EI. Ability EI refers to actual emotional skills measured through performance tests, while trait EI encompasses self-perceived emotional competencies, which are significant for psychological assessment and interventions (Petrides et al., 2004). In educational settings, EI is critical for student engagement, well-being, and academic achievement. Studies indicate that students with higher emotional intelligence manage dynamic learning environments more effectively, demonstrating resilience and collaborative skills in vocational institutions (Wang & Liu, 2022). Moreover, emotional intelligence enhances social competence and professional adaptability. Individuals with higher EI are better equipped to understand and regulate their own emotions (Fredrickson, 2023) while accurately perceiving and responding to others' emotions, leading to improved interpersonal relationships, teamwork, and leadership abilities (Wang & Liu, 2022). This skill set is particularly valuable in higher education and vocational contexts, supporting students' psychological health, effective social interactions, and preparedness for career success (Li et al., 2022).

Guidelines for Developing Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence encompasses several interrelated skills essential for personal and social effectiveness. Self-awareness involves recognizing and understanding one's own emotions and their impact on oneself and others, enabling individuals to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for growth (Goleman, 1995). Emotion management or self-regulation allows individuals to control their emotional responses, maintain psychological equilibrium, and handle conflicts and challenges with resilience (Beck, 2011). Self-motivation, derived from understanding and channeling emotions constructively, helps individuals set and pursue goals with proactivity and persistence (Fredrickson, 2001). Equally important are social and relational components of emotional intelligence. Empathy, or the capacity to perceive and respond to others' emotions, can be developed through active listening, mindfulness, and perspective-taking (Weger et al., 2010; Decety & Jackson, 2006). Maintaining strong relationships requires effective communication, trust-building, conflict management, and mutual support, which can be strengthened through structured exercises, reflection, and practical engagement (Riess et al., 2012). Together, these skills foster interpersonal understanding, collaborative problem-solving, and enhanced social functioning.

Emotional Intelligence and Student Characteristics

Research indicates that a combination of demographic, environmental, and academic factors influences emotional intelligence. Gender differences often show that females tend to score higher on aspects of emotional awareness and empathy. At the same time, males may perform equally or better on ability-based EI under stress, though recent studies suggest these differences are context-dependent and generally small (Petrides et al., 2004). Age also plays a role, with EI improving as students gain social and emotional experiences, enhancing emotional regulation, understanding, and decision-making capacities (Fredrickson, 2023). Living situation and family environment are significant determinants of EI development. Students in stable, supportive households typically exhibit higher self-awareness, emotion regulation, and empathy. At the same time, those living alone may develop independence and self-regulation, though this may come at the cost of social-emotional support (Yıldırım & Akan, 2020). Family income affects access to resources, emotional support, and learning opportunities, with higher-income households generally fostering better EI skills (Yıldırım & Akan, 2020). Academic performance, as measured by GPA, is positively correlated with EI, particularly in stress management, adaptability, and intrapersonal skills, suggesting that students with higher EI are more likely to achieve superior academic outcomes (Yıldırım & Akan, 2020). Collectively, these findings provide a framework for examining how EI varies across gender, age, living situation, family income, and GPA among Nanchang Vocational University students.

METHODS

Population and Sample

Population: The students at Nanchang Vocational University totaled 18,330 persons.

Sample Size: The sample group, selected by stratified random sampling from Nanchang Vocational University, was estimated using the Yamane method, with an error rate of 0.04, yielding a total of 604 samples.

Research Instrument

The research instrument is a questionnaire based on relevant concepts, theories, and the study's conceptual framework. It has two parts:

Part 1: Collects respondents' personal information, including gender, age, living situation, family income, and GPA.

Part 2: Questionnaire for Emotional intelligence with 58 items, 33 questions for personal ability and 25 for social ability. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = lowest, 5 = highest), reflecting the extent to which each statement describes the participant. The mean scores are calculated using a class interval width of 0.8 to facilitate statistical analysis (Boone & Boone, 2012).

The 58-item emotional intelligence questionnaire, covering Personal and Social Abilities, was reviewed by three experts using the IOC method, with all items showing high content validity (0.67–1.00). Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha indicated strong internal consistency for the overall scale (0.871) and its dimensions (Personal: 0.821; Social: 0.865), confirming the questionnaire is both valid and reliable.

Data Analysis

1) Descriptive Statistics: Demographic characteristics and emotional intelligence levels were summarized using basic statistical measures. 2) Inferential Statistics: Differences in emotional intelligence across groups were analysed using t-tests, F-test or One-Way ANOVA.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile: A total of 600 students participated, with a balanced gender distribution (48% male, 52% female) and most aged 18–22 years. Regarding living situations, 43.3% lived with both parents, 25.8% with one parent, 13.8% with a guardian, and 17% independently. Family income was mostly below 10,000 RMB per month, and GPA scores were fairly distributed, with the largest group (41.8%) between 2.50 and 3.00. This diverse sample provides a representative basis for analysing emotional intelligence at Nanchang Vocational University.

Results of Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

1. To investigate the overall emotional intelligence level and the levels in each aspect, namely personal ability and social ability, of students at Nanchang Vocational University. (According to research objective number 1).

Hypothesis H1: The overall and in each aspect of emotional intelligence of students at Nanchang Vocational University have a high level.

Table 1 Overall Rating of the Emotional Intelligence Mean and Standard Deviation

Emotional Intelligence	M	SD	Interpret
Personal Abilities	3.78	0.349	High
Social Ability	3.77	0.357	High
Total	3.78	0.353	High

Table1 presented the descriptive statistics of emotional intelligence of students at Nanchang Vocational University. The overall result indicated that students' emotional intelligence was at a high level (= 3.78, SD = 0.35). The results further showed that emotional intelligence comprised two main dimensions: Personal Abilities, which reached a high level (= 3.78, SD = 0.35), and Social Ability, which also demonstrated a high level (= 3.77, SD = 0.36). These findings support research hypothesis H1: that students at Nanchang Vocational University possess a high level of emotional intelligence.

Results of Comparing the Emotional Intelligence

To compare differences in overall emotional intelligence and in each aspect (personal ability and social ability) among Nanchang Vocational University students categorized by gender, age, residential status, average monthly family income, and cumulative grade point average (GPA) (According to research objective number 2).

Hypothesis H2a: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different genders differ in overall emotional intelligence and in each aspect of emotional intelligence.

H2a1: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different genders differ in their personal abilities in emotional intelligence.

H2a2: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different genders differ in their social abilities and emotional intelligence.

H2a3: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different genders have different overall levels of emotional intelligence.

Table 2 Gender Effect of Emotional Intelligence at Nanchang Vocational University

	Gender	Mean	SE	t-Value	p-Value	df	LL 95%	UL 95%
Personal Abilities	Male	3.697	0.028	-5.856	0.000	598	-0.217	-0.108
	Female	3.860	0.028	-	-	-	-	-
Social Ability	Male	3.691	0.029	-5.275	0.000	598	-0.207	-0.095
	Female	3.842	0.029	-	-	-	-	-
Emotional Intelligence	Male	3.695	0.027	-5.885	0.000	598	-0.210	-0.105
	Female	3.852	0.027	-	-	-	-	-

The independent-samples t-test results revealed significant gender differences in emotional intelligence among students at Nanchang Vocational University. Female students reported significantly higher scores than male students in personal abilities (M = 3.860 vs. 3.697, $t = -5.856$, $p < 0.05$), social ability (M = 3.842 vs. 3.691, $t = -5.275$, $p < 0.05$), and overall emotional intelligence (M = 3.852 vs. 3.695, $t = -5.885$, $p < 0.05$). In all three analyses, the 95% confidence intervals did not include zero, indicating that the differences were stable and statistically reliable. These findings

suggest that gender significantly influences students' emotional intelligence, with female students demonstrating higher levels of personal and social abilities and overall emotional intelligence than male students. Therefore, hypotheses H2a1, H2a2, and H2a3 were supported.

Hypothesis H2b: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different ages differ in overall emotional intelligence and in each aspect of emotional intelligence.

H2b1: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different ages have different personal abilities in emotional intelligence.

H2b2: Students at Nanchang Vocational University of different ages have different social abilities and emotional intelligence.

H2b3: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different ages have different overall levels of emotional intelligence.

Table 3 Age Effect of Emotional Intelligence at Nanchang Vocational University of Students

	Age	Squares	df	Mean	F-Value	p-Value
Personal Abilities	Between Groups	2.166	2	1.083	9.143	0.001***
	Within Groups	70.723	597	0.118		
Social Ability	Between Groups	3.808	2	1.904	15.678	0.001***
	Within Groups	72.493	597	0.121		
Emotional Intelligence	Between Groups	2.807	2	1.404	12.875	0.001***
	Within Groups	65.091	597	0.109		

The one-way ANOVA results showed that age had a significant effect on students' emotional intelligence at Nanchang Vocational University. Significant differences were found in personal abilities ($F = 9.143$, $p = 0.001$), social ability ($F = 15.678$, $p = 0.001$), and overall emotional intelligence ($F = 12.875$, $p = 0.001$). In all three dimensions, the p-values were less than 0.05, indicating that students of different age groups exhibited significantly different levels of emotional intelligence. The relatively small within-group variances further suggest that the observed differences were mainly attributable to age rather than individual variation. These findings demonstrate that age is an important factor influencing students' personal abilities, social ability, and overall emotional intelligence. Therefore, hypotheses H2b1, H2b2, and H2b3 were supported, confirming that emotional intelligence differs significantly across age groups.

Hypothesis H2c: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different living situations differ in overall emotional intelligence and in each aspect of emotional intelligence.

H2c1: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different living situations differ in their personal abilities in emotional intelligence.

H2c2: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different living situations differ in their social ability and emotional intelligence.

H2c3: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different living situations have different overall levels of emotional intelligence.

Table 4 Living Situation Effect on Emotional Intelligence of Students at Nanchang Vocational University

	Living Situation	Squares	df	Mean	F-Value	p-Value
Personal Abilities	Between Groups	2.025	3	0.675	5.676	0.001***
	Within Groups	70.865	596	0.119		
Social Ability	Between Groups	1.949	3	0.65	5.208	0.001***
	Within Groups	74.352	596	0.125		
Emotional Intelligence	Between Groups	1.896	3	0.632	5.706	0.001***
	Within Groups	66.003	596	0.111		

The one-way ANOVA results indicate that living situation has a significant effect on students' emotional intelligence at Nanchang Vocational University. Significant differences were found in personal abilities ($F = 5.676$, $p = 0.001$), social ability ($F = 5.208$, $p = 0.001$), and overall emotional intelligence ($F = 5.706$, $p = 0.001$). These findings show that students' emotional intelligence varies significantly across different living situations, including personal, social, and overall dimensions. Therefore, hypotheses H2c1, H2c2, and H2c3 are all supported.

Hypothesis H2d: The students of Nanchang Vocational University with different families' monthly income have different overall and in each aspect of emotional intelligence.

H2d1: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different family incomes differ in their personal abilities in emotional intelligence.

H2d2: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different family incomes have different social abilities in emotional intelligence.

H2d3: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different family incomes have different overall levels of emotional intelligence.

Table 5 Family's Monthly Income Effect on Personal Abilities of Emotional Intelligence among Students at Nanchang Vocational University

	Monthly Income	Squares	df	Mean	F-Value	p-Value
Personal Abilities	Between Groups	6.359	3	2.120	18.989	0.001***
	Within Groups	66.530	596	0.112		
Social Ability	Between Groups	7.044	3	2.348	20.205	0.001***

Emotional Intelligence	Within Groups	69.257	596	0.116		
	Between Groups	6.647	3	2.216	21.561	0.001***
	Within Groups	61.251	596	0.103		

Across Tables 5 one-way ANOVA results consistently show that family monthly income has a statistically significant effect on students' emotional intelligence across all dimensions. Specifically, significant F values were found for personal ability ($F = 18.989$), social ability ($F = 20.205$, $p = 0.001$), and overall emotional intelligence ($F = 21.561$, $p = 0.001$), with all results indicating significant between-group differences ($p < 0.001$). These findings demonstrate that students from different family income levels differ significantly in their emotional intelligence, including both personal and social competencies and overall emotional intelligence; therefore, hypotheses H2d1, H2d2, and H2d3 are accepted.

Hypothesis H2e: The students of Nanchang Vocational University with different grade point average (GPA) have different overall and in each aspect of emotional intelligence.

H2e1: The students of Nanchang Vocational University with different grade point averages (GPA) have different Personal Abilities of emotional intelligence.

H2e2: Students at Nanchang Vocational University with different grade point averages (GPAs) differ in social ability and emotional intelligence.

H2e3: The students of Nanchang Vocational University with different grade point averages (GPA) have different overall emotional intelligence.

Table 6 Grade Point Average Effect of Emotional Intelligence on Students at Nanchang Vocational University

	Grade Point Average	Squares	df	Mean	F-Value	p-Value
Personal Abilities	Between Groups	14.986	2	7.493	77.256	0.001***
	Within Groups	57.903	597	0.097		
Social Ability	Between Groups	13.972	2	6.986	66.911	0.001***
	Within Groups	62.329	597	0.104		
Emotional Intelligence	Between Groups	14.544	2	7.272	81.369	0.001***
	Within Groups	53.355	597	0.089		

Across Tables 6, the one-way ANOVA results indicate that grade point average (GPA) has a statistically significant effect on students' emotional intelligence. Specifically, significant differences

were found in personal ability ($F = 77.256$), social ability ($F = 66.911$, $p = 0.001$), and overall emotional intelligence ($F = 81.369$, $p = 0.001$), with all p -values below 0.001. The relatively large between-group mean squares relative to within-group variation suggest that GPA meaningfully explains differences among students across all dimensions of emotional intelligence. Therefore, students with different GPA levels show significant differences in both personal and social-emotional abilities and overall emotional intelligence, supporting the acceptance of hypotheses H2e1, H2e2, and H2e3.

CONCLUSION

Research Objectives 1

To investigate the overall emotional intelligence level and the levels in each aspect, namely personal ability and social ability, of students at Nanchang Vocational University. (According to research objective number 1).

The results showed that students at Nanchang Vocational University had a high level of emotional intelligence overall ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.35$). Both dimensions also reached a high level, including Personal Abilities ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.35$) and Social Ability ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.36$), indicating that students possess well-developed intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional competencies, thereby confirming that the overall and each aspect of emotional intelligence are at a high level.

Research Objectives 2

To compare the differences in overall emotional intelligence and in each aspect (personal ability and social ability) of Nanchang Vocational University students categorized by gender, age, residential status, average monthly family income, and cumulative grade point average (GPA)

The comparative analysis revealed significant differences in emotional intelligence across gender, age, living situation, family monthly income, and GPA. Gender differences were significant with t values of -5.856 (Personal Abilities), -5.275 (Social Ability), and -5.885 (Overall EI), all $p < 0.05$. Age showed significant effects with F values of 12.875 (Personal Abilities), 15.678 (Social Ability), and 12.875 (Overall EI), all $p = 0.001$. The living situation also had significant effects, with F values of 5.676 , 5.208 , and 5.706 , all $p = 0.001$. Family monthly income showed significant differences with F values of 18.989 , 20.205 , and 21.561 , all $p \leq 0.001$. GPA demonstrated the strongest effects with F values of 77.256 , 66.911 , and 81.369 , all $p = 0.001$. These results indicate that all examined demographic and academic variables significantly influence students' emotional intelligence.

DISCUSSION

Research Objectives 1

The study examined the overall and specific aspects of emotional intelligence among students at Nanchang Vocational University. The results showed that students possessed a high level of emotional intelligence overall ($M = 3.78$), with both Personal Abilities ($M = 3.78$) and Social Ability ($M = 3.77$) also at high levels. These findings support the research hypothesis (H1) and indicate that students are capable of managing their own emotions and appropriately responding to social situations. This aligns with Goleman (1998), who defined emotional intelligence as encompassing self-awareness, emotional regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills that enable individuals to adapt to social and learning environments. The results also corroborate the findings of Zhang and Fang (2017), who reported that Chinese university students generally have high levels of emotional intelligence, particularly in emotional recognition and regulation. The study suggests that higher education environments, through life skills development, social interaction, and cooperative

activities, cultivate emotional intelligence, preparing students for academic success and future employment.

Research Objectives 2

The study found significant differences across all these factors. Gender differences were significant for Personal Abilities ($t = -5.856$), Social Ability ($t = -5.275$), and overall emotional intelligence ($t = -5.885$), consistent with the findings of Mayer et al. (2004), Petrides and Furnham (2000), and Brackett et al. (2004). Age significantly influenced Personal Abilities ($F = 12.875$), Social Ability ($F = 15.678$), and overall emotional intelligence ($F = 12.875$), supporting the idea that emotional intelligence develops with experience and emotional maturity (Goleman, 1998; Cabello et al., 2016). Living situation had a significant impact on Personal Abilities ($F = 5.676$), Social Ability ($F = 5.208$), and overall emotional intelligence ($F = 5.706$), in line with Zeidner, Matthews, and Roberts (2012) and Yıldırım and Akan (2020), highlighting the role of social environment in emotional development. Family monthly income also affected Personal Abilities ($F = 18.989$), Social Ability ($F = 20.205$), and overall emotional intelligence ($F = 21.561$), consistent with Goleman (1998) and Parker et al. (2004), suggesting that socioeconomic conditions can influence opportunities for the development of emotional and social skills. Finally, GPA had a strong effect on Personal Abilities ($F = 77.256$), Social Ability ($F = 66.911$), and overall emotional intelligence ($F = 81.369$), supporting Schutte et al. (2001) and MacCann et al. (2020), and suggesting that students with higher academic achievement tend to possess better emotional regulation, motivation, and social skills. The study confirms that emotional intelligence is high among students at Nanchang Vocational University, and that demographic and academic factors, especially GPA, significantly influence both the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of emotional intelligence.

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