

Perceived Quality of Friendship and Life Satisfaction of Students: Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence

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College life is a crucial time for students, marked by changes in academia and on the personal front, especially if the students enter a residential campus to spend the next few formative years of their lives. Formation of social bonding in an on-campus setting is often indicated to form the base of a long-standing peer transaction and ultimately friendship. Earlier studies indicate that the quality of friendship acts as a significant predictor in relation to several positive life outcomes, one of which is life satisfaction. However, the said relationship between quality of friendship and life satisfaction is constantly seeking investigations, probing the role of several other intervening factors. One such factor is emotional intelligence which has been reported to predict a wide variety of positive life outcomes. The present study investigates the role of perceived quality of friendship in predicting life satisfaction. It also examines the moderating role of emotional intelligence between the quality of friendship and life satisfaction. The data were collected from 410 students of residential engineering college of Eastern India through a survey using a set of questionnaires measuring quality of friendship, emotional intelligence, and life satisfaction. The findings of the investigation reveal a significant positive relationship between perceived quality of friendship and life satisfaction, and emotional intelligence as a significant moderator between the said associations.

Keywords: Quality of Friendship, Emotional Intelligence, Life Satisfaction, Residential Campus.

According to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) Belongingness Hypothesis, the innate need to belong goes beyond mere attachment or the need for affiliation. Likewise, an apt manifestation of this need is friendship. Contemporary researches have successfully brought forth the necessity of studying friendship, its several attributes, quality and other related factors in different contexts (Brown & Larson, 2009). Previous studies reported high-quality friendship as a predictor of various positive life outcomes such as higher self-esteem, lower level of social anxiety, and increased subjective well-being (Raboteag-Saric & Sakic, 2013). Substantially, happiness, among several correlates of friendship, has taken up a considerable space in contemporary researches in different cross-cultural scenario (Demir, Ozen & Doğan, 2012).

Perceived Quality of Friendship and Life Satisfaction.

A whole array of expectations is formed with the development of peer relationship among

level of criteria. Bukowski and Hoza (1989) discussed about popularity and the level of peer acceptance as two significant attributes of friendship formation. Whereas, Hiatt and colleagues (2015) reported that the difference in perceived friendship quality is related to several types of resources such as the amount of emotional support gained, the companionship, and information exchanged among friends. Furthermore, significant attributes of friendship such as companionship, security in friendship, and conflicts with friends have been reported to determine various life outcomes in young individuals such as: the level of psychological adjustment (Bagwell, Bender, Andreati, et al., 2005; Bowman, 2010), lower level of anxiety, depression, and distress (Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Previous studies also bolster the role of quality of friendship in fostering positive consequences among young individuals. A recent study on school girls reveals that quality of friendship dimensions, especially disclosure and support, moderated to predict higher level of well-being (Cuadros & Berger, 2016). Moreover, higher perceived quality of friendship has been also found to generate beneficial behavioural and life satisfaction (Tomé, Matos, Simões, Camacho, & Alves Diniz, 2012); enhanced resilience (Graber, Turner, & Madilland, 2015); and happiness (Demir & Weitekamp, 2007) among young individuals.

Emotional Intelligence as a moderator

A social relationship such as friendship is a multifaceted phenomenon and like any other relationship it comprises of social exchange. In the Affect Theory of Social Exchange, Lawler (2001) describes emotions within groups and individuals as a significant element influencing the strength of the relationships. More essentially, previous studies on emotional management prominently focus on the positive association between emotional competencies and the self-perceived quality of friendship (Lopes et al., 2004). In this context, emotional intelligence deserves mention as a significant contributor of psychological well-being (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006). Emotional intelligence is defined as an ability to perceive the

reality in order to gain a better understanding of one's own emotion and ways to manage it; while being adaptable to respond to others' affective need (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotional intelligence takes into consideration human emotion, experience, intention (Pradhan, Kumar & Awasthy, 2008) and social dynamics to offer a significant amount of emotional management. Furthermore, emotional management has been found to facilitate personal growth, subjective well-being (Avsec, Masnec, & Komidar, 2009) and life satisfaction (Runcan & Ilovu, 2013).

Objective of the Study

Adams and Allan (1998) reported that context plays an important scenario in determining friendship. The authors further stated that the person-environment context in friendship encompasses a whole range of attributes such as place and setting, personal environment, leisure, and work to name a few. One significant environment which provides impetus to friendship development is an individual's transition to college (Al-Qaissy, 2010). Apparently, the transition phase can be either emotionally challenging or engaging for a student (Thurber & Walton, 2012). In addition, the support available from the social relationships formed within the premise of the academic campus facilitates easy adaptation to the subsequent change (Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008). However, earlier empirical investigation reports a scarcity in empirical literature relating to investigations on friendship and well-being among college students (Demir & Weitekamp, 2007).

Recent empirical investigations also emphasise on the possibility of exploration of the mechanism and the course through which the quality of friendship among individuals predict happiness (Demir, Jaafar, Bilyk, & Arif, 2012). In addition, Demir, Cuisinier and Khoury (2015) emphasised the requirement of studying the potential moderators and mediators between the friendship and happiness. Besides, Gleckels (2015) recent investigation also corroborates the necessity to study the link between friendship and happiness, taking into consideration different measures of subjective well-being. Based on the above-mentioned research gaps,

the present study takes into consideration the need to explore the role of perceived quality of friendship in determining life satisfaction of on-campus college students and the role of emotional intelligence as a moderator.

The hypotheses of the study are:

- (1) *Perceived quality of friendship has a positive effect on life satisfaction of on-campus students.*
- (2) *Emotional intelligence positively moderates the association between perceived quality of friendship and life satisfaction of on-campus students.*

Method

Tools

Quality of friendship was assessed by using Mendelson & Aboud's, *McGill Friendship Questionnaire-Friend's Functions* (1999). It measures six dimensions of friendship namely: reliable alliance, stimulating companionship, help, emotional security, self-validation, and intimacy. Furthermore, the friendship quality scale has been found to be appropriate for use in collectivistic cultural scenario in a recent investigation on social skills, friendship and happiness on Malay students (Demir, Jaafar, Bilyk, et al., 2012). The scale consists of 30 items based on an 8-point scale. Each scale item is rated from 0 to 8 (0 = never to 8 = always). The scale also provides the opportunity to compute a total friendship quality score by calculating the average of scores obtained in the six sub scales. The respondents in the present study were asked to score each item keeping in view a close friend within their academic campus.

The Wong and Law *Emotional Intelligence Scale* (WLEI) was used for measuring emotional intelligence of the participants in the present study. The WLEI scale shows an appropriate fit with Asian population especially Indian college students (Ng, Wang, Zabaquet & Bodenorn, 2008). Besides, recent use of the WLEI scale also corroborates its use to measure emotional intelligence in Indian context (Pradhan, Jena & Singh, 2017). The scale contains 16 items based on a 5-point rating scale (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied) and measures four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-emotion appraisal

Results

The descriptive statistics and correlation of the variables used in the study is depicted in Table 1. Quality of friendship, life satisfaction and emotional intelligence showed a positive association with each other (Table-1). Lewis and colleagues' (2004) suggestion on the range of skewness and kurtosis (+2 to -2) was considered for normality. The variables in the study fell well within the ranges. The reliability of the scales used in the present study was reported to be 0.86 (friendship quality scale), 0.82 (emotional intelligence scale), and 0.75 (life satisfaction), thus meeting the expectation for internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). No significant difference was observed for quality of friendship, emotional intelligence, and life satisfaction for the two age groups and between male and female participants.

Hierarchical multiple regression on life satisfaction

Following Field's (2013) guidelines of regression analysis, preliminary investigations were conducted. The variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance were checked for multicollinearity (Dennis, 2016). Value of VIF obtained in the study was quite below the cut off line 10 (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). On the other hand, tolerance level in the regression analysis was also found to be acceptable and below the cut-off of 1.0 (Dennis, 2016). To study the interaction effect, the predictors in the study were centered following Aiken and West's (1991) suggestion to avoid multicollinearity. Age and gender were used as covariates in the study and was further dummy coded for convenience in analysis. A liberal criterion was set to test

interaction effect in regression analysis ($p = .01$) based on experts' view that the effect size of interaction is relatively small in comparison to first order effect (Pechazur & Schmelkin, 1991, McClelland & Judd, 1993).

The correlation analysis shows a significant and positive association between quality of friendship, emotional intelligence and life satisfaction (Table-1). Hierarchical multiple regression (Table 2) was conducted with life satisfaction as the outcome or the dependent variable, perceived quality of friendship as the independent variable and emotional intelligence as the moderator. In the first model of the analysis, age and gender were entered as covariates. In the second model the analysis on quality of friendship was entered; here perceived quality of friendship explained 7% of the variance in the value of life satisfaction of students. Emotional intelligence was entered in the third model, and it accounted for 17% of variance in life satisfaction. In the fourth model, the results of two-way interaction between the quality of friendship and emotional intelligence were entered. Here, interaction accounted for 18% of the variance in life satisfaction in step 3.

Interaction was further analysed with the help of simple slope analysis in ModGraph-I (Jose, 2013). It found that there is a positive relationship between perceived quality of friendship and life satisfaction at high, medium, and low level of emotional intelligence (as shown in figure 1). Steepest slope occurred for individuals who reported high emotional intelligence ($b = 1.13$, $t = 3.24$, $p < .01$) than medium ($b = 1.02$, $t = 3.28$, $p < .01$) and low emotional intelligence ($b = 0.91$, $t = 3.34$, $p < .01$). This signifies that an individual's quality of friendship would benefit

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among the Variables in the study

	M (SD)	Gender	Age	FQ	EI	SAT
Gender	-	1	0.41**	-0.02	-0.012*	-0.01
Age	19.91(1.47)		1	-0.05	-0.04	0.06
FQ	36.40(6.28)			1	0.35**	0.26**
EI	15.08(1.99)				1	0.39**
SAT	21.60(6.73)					1

Notes: FQ = friendship quality, EI = emotional intelligence, SAT = life satisfaction
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

more with higher level of emotional intelligence in enhancing their level of life satisfaction.

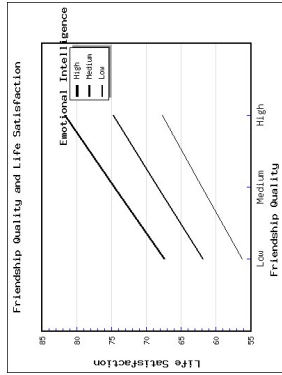


Figure 1: Interaction effect of quality of friendship and emotional intelligence

The findings of the study further indicate a small interaction effect (Cohen, 1969) as reported in Table-2. However, works of Champoux and Peters (1987); and Chaplin (1991) suggests that effect sizes may vary between 1% to 2% and is extensively recognized in social science researches.

Discussion

The findings of the present study revealed that emotional intelligence positively influenced life satisfaction. The combined effect of quality of friendship and emotional intelligence significantly predicted life satisfaction of students. In a college environment peer interdependence becomes

of physical existence of family, friends play a family-like role by providing much of social support. Looking from a cultural viewpoint, as India comes majority under the 'collectivist society' development, it also might be exerted that the very development of the Indian mindset is to maintain collective harmony and develop an 'in-group' feeling (Kapp, 1963; Lapiere, 1986; Marriot, 1976; Sinha, 1985, 2014). Also, the very concept of 'self' varies across cultures (e.g. Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2007; Oishi, Koo, & Akimoto, 2008). Previous research suggests that individualistic societies felt happier when their personal self was accurately perceived while collectivists felt happier when their collective self was accurately perceived (Oishi, Koo, & Akimoto, 2008). This embedment of self in society calls for perception of satisfaction and happiness in social relationships (in the current context the social relationship being friendship).

In addition, emotional intelligence was revealed to be a significant factor in enhancing the link between quality of friendship and life satisfaction. Emotional intelligence, whether it is low, medium or high, somehow moderates the quality of close relationships as it provides clarity in comprehending and managing emotions among students and thus provides healthier ways to deal with daily stressors of varied form and ultimately leading to well-being (Gohm & Clore, 2002). Therefore, the prominent role of emotional management in regulating interpersonal affect and in fostering quality of friendship cannot be denied (Niven, Holman, & Totterdell, 2012).

Conclusion

We may conclude from the results of the study that higher perceived quality of friendship leads to higher life satisfaction among students living in a residential academic institution, and the said association is strengthened by higher level of emotional intelligence.

The result of the study has far reaching implications in terms of gender disparity, which is displayed. As pointed out by previous studies, females generally experience supportive and intimate friendship with their peers (Oswald et al., 2004) than male students. This study had an overrepresentation of males which is a prominent consideration in the context of association between friendship and well-being. Hence, the result of the study cannot be generalised across

genders. There is also a considerable dearth of friendship studies on how gender contributes in developing friendship among individuals in higher education (Bronkema, 2014). Thus, future studies could address this by involving more female samples in their investigation. Moreover, the study offers a nuanced advance towards the understanding of quality of friendship and life satisfaction of students living in academic facilities. Certain significant factors related to the association between friendship and happiness could not be taken in consideration such as personality (Demir & Weitekamp, 2007), social support (Matecki & Demaray, 2003), and parental and peer attachment (Ma & Huebner, 2008).

The viability of perceived quality of friendship to predict well-being among individuals is again dependent on certain crucial factors like control and choice of involvement in the relationship (Gleickel, 2015), which could be explored further ahead. This tangible power of control makes the outcome of friendship more spontaneous and manageable.

The strength of the study lies in its propensity to add to the existing repository of western literature on relationship between friendship and happiness with evidence from a South-Asian perspective. Moreover, the study also addresses the dearth of studies investigating the role of emotional intelligence as a possible moderator between quality of friendship and life satisfaction. The current study also has significant implications in counselling and/or therapy, which is tailor-made for individuals and an understanding of emotional intelligence of the students, can greatly aid the process of counselling, as it may help in maintaining an empathetic balance (Poullis, 2015).

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Table 2: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Life Satisfaction (N = 410)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4					
	B	SE (B)	B	SE (B)	B	SE (B)	B	SE (B)				
Age	0.37	0.25	0.08	0.43	0.24	0.09	0.38	0.22	0.08			
Gender	-0.77	0.87	-0.04	-0.76	0.84	-0.04	-0.04	0.80	-0.01	-0.10	0.79	-0.01
FQ			0.28	0.05	0.26***	0.15	0.05	0.14**	0.19	0.05	0.18***	
EI						1.18	0.16	0.34***	1.16	0.16	0.34***	
FQ x EI								0.05	-0.09	0.13**		
R ²	0.01		0.07		0.18		0.18		0.19			
F for change in R ²	1.151		31.16***		51.6***		8.10**					

Note: Quality of friendship and Emotional intelligence were centered at their means. For gender, 0 = male, 1 = female; FQ = friendship quality; EI = emotional intelligence; SAT = life satisfaction. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

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