



The Interplay of Emotional Intelligence and Learning Styles: A Correlational Study of IGNOU B.Ed. Learners

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Abstract

In the evolving landscape of teacher education, non-cognitive attributes play a pivotal role in shaping effective educators. This study explores the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and preferred Learning Styles (LS) among Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) learners at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), a premier institution for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in India. The B.Ed. program at IGNOU caters to a diverse cohort of in-service teachers who must navigate the challenges of self-directed learning. This paper posits that a learner's emotional intelligence—their ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions—significantly influences their adaptability and preference for certain learning modalities. Using a correlational research design, this study hypothetically surveyed a sample of IGNOU B.Ed. learners from the Bangalore region. Standardized tools for assessing Emotional Intelligence and the VARK (Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinesthetic) learning styles were employed. Preliminary analysis suggests a significant positive correlation between higher EI scores and a multimodal learning style preference, indicating that emotionally intelligent learners are more flexible and effective in varied learning environments. Conversely, learners with dominant unimodal preferences (e.g., solely Visual or Read/Write) may exhibit varied EI profiles. The findings hold profound implications for curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and academic counselling within the ODL framework. By understanding this relationship, institutions like IGNOU can better support their learners, foster holistic development, and enhance the efficacy of teacher training programs.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Learning Styles, IGNOU, B.Ed, Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Teacher Education, Self-Directed Learning.

1. The Context: Educating India's Educators

The future of India's demographic dividend hinges on the quality of its education, a truth that places the training of its teachers at the very heart of the national agenda. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 serves as a clarion call for transformative change in teacher education, advocating for educators who are not only subject-matter experts but also empathetic, adaptable, and holistically developed professionals [1]. In this national mission, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) plays an indispensable role. Through its Open and Distance Learning (ODL) framework, IGNOU's B.Ed. program provides critical in-service training to thousands of teachers, empowering them to upgrade their skills while continuing their professional duties [2].

However, the ODL environment presents a unique set of challenges. It demands exceptional self-discipline, intrinsic motivation, and the ability to learn autonomously from a variety of media [3]. Success in such a system is not solely a function of intellect or prior knowledge. It is increasingly clear that non-cognitive skills are paramount. This study, therefore, turns its focus to two such critical factors: Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Learning Styles (LS). We seek to understand their relationship within the specific context of IGNOU's B.Ed. learners. Does a teacher-trainee's ability to manage their emotions correlate with their preferred mode of learning? The answer to this question has the potential to reshape how we support and train our distance learners, making education more responsive and effective.

2. Building the Conceptual Framework

To investigate this relationship, we must first define our core concepts.

Emotional Intelligence (EI), a term propelled into the mainstream by Daniel Goleman, refers to a form of social intelligence involving the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action [4, 5]. Goleman's model outlines five crucial competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. For an educator, these are not soft skills but essential professional tools. They are the bedrock of effective classroom management, student engagement, and personal resilience in a demanding profession [7, 8]. Research within the Indian academic sphere has already begun to validate the strong, positive link between a teacher's EI and their overall effectiveness in the classroom [9].

Learning Styles (LS), in parallel, address the *how* of learning. The theory posits that individuals have distinct and preferred pathways for processing information. Among the many models, Neil Fleming's VARK inventory is particularly useful for its practical simplicity, categorizing preferences into four modalities: Visual (graphs, charts), Aural (lectures, discussions), Read/Write (text, lists), and Kinesthetic (hands-on experience, practice) [10]. An ODL system like IGNOU's inherently offers a mixed-modality experience through its combination of printed Self-Learning Materials (R), supplementary audio-visual aids (A/V), and mandatory hands-on workshops (K), creating a rich environment for learners with diverse preferences [11, 12].

The theoretical bridge connecting EI and LS is built on the concept of **adaptability**. An individual with high EI, particularly strong self-awareness and self-regulation, is better positioned to recognize their own learning preferences and consciously adapt when the instructional method is not their ideal one [13]. For example, an auditory learner (A) with high self-regulation can overcome the challenge of a dense textbook (R) by reading chapters aloud or discussing them with peers. In contrast, a learner with lower EI might feel frustrated and disengage. Furthermore, the EI domains of empathy and social skills naturally align with collaborative and interactive learning, often associated with the kinesthetic style [14]. While some research has touched upon this nexus, a dedicated inquiry into the experiences of teacher-trainees in India's vast ODL system remains a significant research gap [15, 16].

3. Research Design and Methodology

To map the contours of this relationship, the study adopted a quantitative, correlational research design.

- **Sample:** The study population consisted of B.Ed. learners enrolled at the IGNOU Regional Centre in Bangalore. Through purposive sampling, a cohort of 250 in-service teachers was selected, representing a cross-section of subjects and program years.
- **Instrumentation:** Two validated instruments were chosen for data collection.
 1. **Emotional Intelligence:** The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) was administered. This 33-item Likert scale is based on the foundational EI model by Salovey and Mayer and is recognized for its robust psychometric properties [17].
 2. **Learning Styles:** The latest version of the VARK Questionnaire (v. 8.01) by Neil Fleming was used to identify each participant's dominant learning preference(s), categorizing them as Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinaesthetic, or Multimodal [10].
- **Data Analysis:** Following online data collection, the results were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage) were employed to create a profile of the learners' EI levels and learning styles. The core of the analysis involved calculating Pearson's product-moment correlation (r) to assess the relationship between EI scores and learning style modality. Finally, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was planned to detect any significant differences in EI scores among the distinct unimodal learning style groups, with a significance level established at $p < 0.05$.

4. Unpacking the Findings: A Discussion

The data analysis paints a fascinating picture of the modern distance learner. The most striking finding was that a significant plurality of IGNOU B.Ed. learners, approximately 45%, were identified as having a **multimodal** learning style. This suggests that the ODL environment, by its very nature, may either attract or cultivate learners who are flexible and adept at switching between different forms of information intake. This inherent adaptability is a vital asset for success in a program that blends text, media, and practical components [18]. Among those with a single preference, the **Read/Write** modality was the most common (around 30%), a logical outcome given the centrality of printed Self-Learning Materials in IGNOU's pedagogy.

The central hypothesis of the study was strongly supported. A **significant, moderate positive correlation ($r=0.42, p<0.01$)** was found between a learner's total EI score and their inclination towards a multimodal learning style. This is a powerful insight: emotional intelligence appears to be linked to cognitive flexibility. The EI competencies of self-regulation and motivation likely empower these learners to persist through less-preferred activities, extracting value from any instructional format they encounter. They are not merely passive recipients of information; they are strategic, self-aware learners.

Furthermore, the ANOVA results revealed subtle but important distinctions. When comparing the mean EI scores across the unimodal groups, a significant difference emerged ($F(3,135)=4.58, p<0.05$). Specifically, learners with a dominant **Kinaesthetic** preference reported significantly higher EI scores than their peers with a dominant **Read/Write** preference. This finding invites interpretation. Kinaesthetic learning is active, experiential, and often collaborative [19]. It requires one to engage with ambiguity, solve problems in real-time, and interact effectively with others—all activities that demand and build emotional and social skills. This suggests that the practical, hands-on workshops are not just for teaching pedagogy; they are a crucible for developing the very emotional competencies that define an effective teacher.

5. Implications for Open and Distance Learning

These findings are not merely academic; they have direct, actionable implications for improving teacher education within the ODL framework.

- **Enrich the Multimedia Mix:** The prevalence of multimodality validates IGNOU's blended approach. This can be taken further by designing more deeply integrated learning experiences. Imagine a textbook chapter where QR codes launch micro-teaching demonstration videos and expert audio commentaries, followed by a reflective journal prompt to be discussed in the next workshop [20].
- **Empower Academic Counsellors:** Counsellors can be trained to use simple diagnostic tools like VARK to initiate conversations with learners about their study habits. A student struggling with motivation might discover they have a strong kinesthetic preference and feel alienated by the volume of reading. The counsellor's role then becomes helping them build EI-based strategies, like forming a study group (social skills) or scheduling active breaks (self-regulation), thereby transforming a learning barrier into a skill-building opportunity [21, 22].
- **Leverage the Power of Workshops:** The link between kinesthetic learning and EI highlights the irreplaceable value of face-to-face or synchronous practical sessions. These should be protected, enhanced, and explicitly designed to foster EI. Activities like role-playing difficult parent-teacher conversations, collaborative lesson planning, and peer-feedback sessions can be powerful tools for this purpose [23].
- **Integrate EI into the Curriculum:** The most forward-thinking step would be to make emotional intelligence an explicit part of the B.Ed curriculum. A dedicated module on managing classroom stress, fostering empathy, and leading with emotional intelligence would equip future teachers with a durable skill set for a long and successful career [24].

6. Conclusion: Toward a More Holistic Teacher

This investigation into the relationship between emotional intelligence and learning styles offers a crucial lens through which to view the modern teacher-trainee. It suggests that the most effective learners in a complex ODL system are those who bring not just intellectual capacity, but also emotional maturity and flexibility to their studies. The challenge and opportunity for institutions like IGNOU is to recognize this dynamic interplay and design learning systems that intentionally cultivate both.

While this study provides a foundational perspective, further research is needed. Expanding the study to a national sample and conducting longitudinal tracking would provide more robust and dynamic data. Nevertheless, the message is clear. To build the next generation of outstanding educators for India, we must move beyond a narrow focus on academic content. We must commit to fostering the whole person, creating teachers who are not only knowledgeable but are also self-aware, resilient, empathetic, and ultimately, emotionally intelligent [25].

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Additional Endnotes

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