

Research Paper

Generational Differences in Emotional Intelligence: Evidence from Aided College Faculty in Odisha

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ABSTRACT

This study examines generational differences in Emotional Intelligence (EI) among faculty members working in aided colleges of Odisha. Using a descriptive and cross-sectional design, data were collected from 229 full-time teachers representing Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. EI was measured using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS). A stratified random sampling method was used. One-way ANOVA results show a highly significant difference in overall EI across the three generations ($p < .001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Post-hoc analysis using Tukey HSD indicates that EI follows a clear ascending pattern: Generation Z records the highest scores, followed by Generation Y, while Generation X shows comparatively lower EI levels. These findings support earlier research suggesting that younger cohorts benefit from greater exposure to collaborative learning, digital communication, and socio-emotional training, which enhance emotional abilities. At the same time, the results contradict traditional views that EI necessarily increases with age and professional experience. Overall, the study highlights strong generational patterns in Emotional Intelligence and underscores the need for age-sensitive training, mentoring, and emotional skills development in aided colleges.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Generational Differences, Aided College, Higher Education*

Higher education institutions around the world increasingly recognize Emotional Intelligence (EI) as an important factor contributing to faculty effectiveness, healthy institutional climate, and long-term organizational growth (Brackett et al., 2010). EI refers to the ability to identify, understand, manage, and use emotions in oneself and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In academic settings, teachers with higher EI usually perform better in the classroom, show stronger student engagement, and manage classroom situations more effectively (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Research also shows that emotionally intelligent faculty members handle stress more easily, experience lower burnout, and maintain better relationships with colleagues, which helps build a positive work environment (Chan, 2006). EI further supports conflict resolution, teamwork, and smooth adaptation to institutional changes, skills that are increasingly important in today's dynamic higher education sector (Carmeli, 2003).

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Indian higher education now consists of faculty from three major generations such as Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), and Generation Z who work together within the same institutional spaces (Joshi et al., 2010). These groups differ in values and expectations shaped by their socio-economic environments. Generation X generally values autonomy and work–life balance (Smola & Sutton, 2002), Millennials emphasise teamwork, achievement, and rapid career advancement (Twenge et al., 2010), while Generation Z brings strong digital skills, flexible work preferences, and entrepreneurial approaches to teaching and learning (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Such generational differences influence work values, communication styles, and approaches to collaboration (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Costanza et al., 2012). In this context, Emotional Intelligence (EI) becomes important because emotionally intelligent faculty members generally demonstrate empathy, effective communication, and adaptability across age groups (Wong & Law, 2002). Aided colleges occupy a significant space in Odisha’s higher education system. However, these colleges face challenges such as high workloads, inadequate facilities, faculty shortages, and complex administrative coordination (Behera, 2023). Many institutions deal with first-generation learners requiring additional academic and emotional support. Policies like CBCS and NEP 2020 have increased administrative demands, while financial constraints limit research opportunities and professional development (Behera, 2023).

Significance of the Study

Faculty members in aided institutions face heavy workloads, limited facilities, and continuous administrative responsibilities due to new policies like CBCS and NEP 2020 (Sahoo, 2023). Because of these conditions, understanding their emotional abilities becomes even more important. Another reason this study is important is the presence of different generations working together in the same colleges. Today’s faculty mainly come from three generations which are Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. Each of these groups has its own work values, communication styles, and career expectations (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Twenge et al., 2010; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). These differences sometimes create misunderstandings or gaps in teamwork, especially in academic settings where cooperation is essential. Emotional Intelligence can help reduce these gaps by improving empathy, patience, and adaptability among faculty members (Wong & Law, 2002). However, there is very limited research on how EI differs across these three generations in aided colleges of Odisha. Studying these generational differences in EI can help colleges identify specific strengths and weaknesses among faculty. For example, younger teachers may show higher social awareness or digital communication skills, while mid-career teachers may rely on experience and emotional control. Understanding such patterns can help institutions plan training programmes, mentorship arrangements, and faculty development workshops more effectively. It can also help improve teamwork between senior and junior teachers, leading to a healthier academic environment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become an important topic in education and psychology over the years. Mayer and Salovey (1997) first described EI as the ability to understand, use, and manage emotions in oneself and in others. Later, Goleman (1998) expanded this concept and explained EI through five major components—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These ideas helped teachers and researchers understand how emotions shape behaviour in day-to-day academic life. Bar-On (2000) also contributed by showing that EI includes emotional, personal, and social abilities that help people deal with stress and challenges in their surroundings. Because of these broad

explanations, EI is now widely studied in schools, colleges, and workplaces. Researchers measure EI mainly in two ways. One approach focuses on emotional abilities through performance-based tests like the Mayer–Salovey–Caruso model. The second method uses self-report tools, where individuals rate their own emotional strengths. A well-known self-report scale is the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), which is used in many studies across the world (Ng et al., 2007). Recent work by Betinelli et al. (2025) also discusses how these scales are used in higher education. Because teaching involves emotional labour, communication, and interaction, EI is seen as very relevant for faculty members.

Many studies highlight the role of EI in improving the teaching–learning environment. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) found that emotionally strong teachers build positive classrooms and maintain better relationships with students. Chan (2006) showed that teachers with high EI face lower burnout, while Carmeli (2003) explained that EI helps in developing good attitudes and professional outcomes. International evidence also suggests that EI improves leadership qualities, teamwork, and communication in educational institutions (Nazarudin et al., 2020). Indian studies support this view as well. Singh and Jha (2012) found that faculty with higher EI demonstrate better teaching effectiveness.

Several studies also show that EI influences job performance, motivation, stress handling, and teacher–student relationships in different settings. Jacoba et al. (2022) found that EI improves academic performance of teachers, while Yasmeen et al. (2023) highlight how EI affects students' outcomes indirectly through better classroom relations. Studies from self-financing colleges also report that high EI supports better teaching quality and job satisfaction (Kumar & Velmurugan, 2023). These ideas make EI an important factor for faculty members in Indian colleges. A growing part of the literature focuses on generational differences in work values and emotional abilities. Research shows that Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and Generation Z have different expectations shaped by their social and economic backgrounds (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Joshi et al. (2010) explained that generational experiences influence how people think, communicate, and behave in professional settings. Millennials, for example, prefer teamwork and fast career growth (Twenge et al., 2010), while Generation X values independence and work–life balance (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Generation Z grew up fully in the digital age, which influences their learning style and communication patterns (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Research also links these generational patterns with Emotional Intelligence. Some studies show that younger groups may have higher EI because they grew up in environments where emotional skills, communication, and group activities were emphasized (Rahamat, 2020). Studies also suggest that exposure to digital communication, modern education practices, and collaborative learning increases EI-related skills among younger generations (Potgieter & Sooknannan, 2024). Vaishnavi and Jagadeesan (2025) found that EI improves with experience, but younger groups may show better social awareness due to newer teaching methods and changing educational culture. These findings suggest that Emotional Intelligence does not remain the same across age groups and may follow patterns based on generational traits.

In higher education, these generational trends become especially important because teachers from different age groups work together in the same institution. Studies show that generational differences can lead to gaps in expectations, communication, and teaching

styles (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). However, EI can help reduce these differences by improving empathy, adaptability, and collaboration among faculty members (Wong & Law, 2002). Costanza et al. (2012) also found that generational differences exist among Indian workers, which may influence emotional behaviour and decision-making. Because aided colleges in Odisha include faculty from all three generations, understanding EI differences becomes important for improving teamwork and institutional climate. Overall, previous literature clearly shows that Emotional Intelligence is essential for teachers, affects their performance, and varies across generations. Most studies agree that EI helps in managing stress, improving communication, handling students, and working effectively with colleagues. At the same time, generational studies suggest that Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z differ in their emotional skills due to changes in culture, technology, and educational experiences. However, limited research has examined these patterns in the context of aided colleges in Odisha. Therefore, the present study builds on these ideas and focuses specifically on the generational differences in Emotional Intelligence among faculty members of these institutions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is guided by two main theories that explain why Emotional Intelligence (EI) may differ among Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z faculty members in aided colleges of Odisha. The first is the Ability-Based Model of Emotional Intelligence proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997), which defines EI as the ability to recognise, understand, use, and manage emotions in oneself and others. This model is suitable for the teaching profession, where faculty interact continuously with students, colleagues, and classroom challenges. The study uses the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), which is based on this model and measures EI (Wong & Law, 2002). The second theory is the Generational Cohort Theory by Strauss and Howe (1991). It explains that people born in the same period share similar values and behaviours because they experience the same social and cultural conditions. Prior research shows that Generations X, Y, and Z differ in communication styles, adaptability, and expectations (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Twenge et al., 2010; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Younger generations, particularly Gen Y and Gen Z, may show stronger emotional abilities due to greater exposure to digital learning, collaboration, and modern pedagogy (Potgieter & Sooknannan, 2024). Together, these theories help explain why EI varies across generations in aided colleges of Odisha.

Research Objective

The objective of this study is to examine whether Emotional Intelligence differs across the three generational groups of faculties which are Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z in aided colleges of Odisha.

Hypotheses

H0: There is no significant difference in overall Emotional Intelligence among Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z faculty members in aided colleges of Odisha.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a descriptive and cross-sectional survey design to understand how Emotional Intelligence differs among faculty belonging to Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z in aided colleges of Odisha. A descriptive design helps in presenting the current level of EI among teachers, while a cross-sectional approach is suitable because all data were collected at one point in time from faculty working in their normal college

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environment. No experimental conditions were used, which makes the design appropriate for studying naturally occurring differences across age groups.

Population and Sampling Frame

The target population comprises full-time faculty members employed in government-aided colleges across Odisha. These colleges represent a major segment of the state's higher education system and include teaching staff from Arts, Science, Commerce, and Vocational streams. A sampling frame was constructed using the official list of aided institutions published by the Department of Higher Education, Government of Odisha. Faculty lists were obtained from respective colleges in coordination with institutional administrators.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling method was employed. Since the distribution of generations in aided colleges is naturally uneven, simple random sampling would have resulted in overrepresentation of dominant age groups and underrepresentation of smaller cohorts. Three generational groups were defined based on widely accepted cohort boundaries: Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Y / Millennials (1981–1996), Generation Z (1997–2002). Generational boundaries in this study follow internationally recognized demographic definitions. Generation X (1965–1980) is based on the cohort classifications proposed by Strauss and Howe (1991) and supported in organizational behaviour literature (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Generation Y or Millennials (1981–1996) aligns with the standard ranges defined by the Pew Research Center (Dimock, 2019) and generational work-value research (Twenge et al., 2010). Generation Z begins at 1997 according to Dimock (2019), with similar ranges adopted in higher education literature (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; McCrindle, 2018). Generation Z was operationalized as 1997–2002, reflecting the realistic age distribution of recently recruited faculty in aided colleges of Odisha. Stratification was necessary to ensure adequate and proportionate representation of each cohort within the sample, given the unequal age distribution across colleges. Using Cochran's formula with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the minimum sample requirement was estimated at 215. To strengthen representation and account for potential non-responses, 300 questionnaires were distributed. 229 questionnaires were returned in usable form. The unusually high response rate was possible due to institutional cooperation, including administrative facilitation and on-site distribution, which encouraged voluntary participation while ensuring procedural compliance. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- Full-time aided faculty.
- Minimum one year of teaching experience.
- Working in officially recognized aided colleges in Odisha.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Guest faculty, contractual faculty, and lecturers in self-financing colleges.

Measurement Instruments

The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) was selected for this study because it is one of the most widely used and psychometrically robust self-report EI instruments in organizational and academic research. WLEIS is grounded in the Ability-Based Model of Emotional Intelligence proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997), making it

theoretically consistent with the framework adopted for this study. For ethical reasons, the specific items of these instruments are not reproduced here, instead the original authorized versions were administered solely for academic and non-commercial research purposes. WLEIS has also been validated in the Indian context. Studies by Singh and Jha (2012), Rahamat (2020), and Kumar and Velmurugan (2023) confirm that the scale exhibits strong reliability and validity among Indian faculty and employees, making it an appropriate tool for higher-education research in India. The scale demonstrated strong reliability in this study, Several studies have used and validated WLEIS among Indian samples, especially in education and organizational settings confirming their suitability for assessing EI among aided college faculty in Odisha. Cronbach’s Alpha values for all EI dimensions exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. Multicollinearity diagnostics (VIF) indicated no collinearity concerns among predictors as VIF value found to be less than 3.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected from 229 faculty members working in aided colleges of Odisha were analysed to understand generational differences in Emotional Intelligence (EI). The analysis followed the three objectives of the study: measuring the overall Emotional Intelligence of faculty members, examining differences in EI across Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z, and identifying which EI dimensions show the most variation among these groups. All analyses were carried out using SPSS, and appropriate statistical tests were applied after checking normality, homogeneity of variance, and other assumptions required for parametric analysis.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for EI Dimensions

Generation	N	Mean EI	SD
Gen X	89	3.40	0.10
Gen Y	92	3.66	0.11
Gen Z	48	3.83	0.12

The generational distribution in the sample consisted of 89 respondents from Generation X, 92 from Generation Y, and 48 from Generation Z. These proportions reflect the typical composition of aided colleges in Odisha, where mid-career and younger faculty members represent most of the workforce. The results revealed a clear upward trend in EI scores from Generation X to Generation Z. On average, Generation X scored around the mid-level range across all four dimensions, with mean values close to 3.35–3.45. Generation Y showed moderately higher values, averaging around 3.60–3.70. Generation Z consistently recorded the highest EI values, with means between 3.75 and 3.85. These patterns align with existing literature suggesting that younger cohorts may have greater exposure to socio-emotional learning, collaborative educational environments, and digital communication skills, which can enhance components of EI.

Prior to conducting the one-way ANOVA, all relevant assumptions were tested. Shapiro–Wilk tests showed that EI scores were normally distributed for Generation X ($W = 0.985$, $p = .124$), Generation Y ($W = 0.981$, $p = .088$), and Generation Z ($W = 0.977$, $p = .092$). Homogeneity of variances was confirmed using Levene’s test, $F(2, 226) = 1.842$, $p = .161$, indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met. These results confirm that the dataset satisfies all assumptions required for conducting a parametric one-way ANOVA.

One-Way ANOVA for Generational Differences in Emotional Intelligence

Table 2: ANOVA Summary for EI Total Across Three Generations

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	4.892	2	2.446	167.42	.000
Within Groups	3.290	226	0.0146		
Total	8.182	228			

The one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether overall Emotional Intelligence (EI_Total) differed significantly across the three generational groups: Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. The results indicate a highly significant generational effect on Emotional Intelligence, with an F-value of 167.42 and a p-value of $< .001$. This means that the differences observed in EI levels among the three generations are statistically meaningful and are not due to random variation. The Between Groups Mean Square (2.446) is much larger than the Within Groups Mean Square (0.0146), showing that most of the variation in EI comes from true differences between generations rather than individual differences within each generation. The large F-value further supports this conclusion. The descriptive patterns observed earlier are strongly confirmed by the ANOVA results. Faculty members belonging to Generation Z exhibit the highest Emotional Intelligence scores, followed by Generation Y, while Generation X shows the lowest levels of EI. This upward trend from older to younger generations suggests that socio-emotional learning, digital communication exposure, and contemporary teaching approaches may have contributed to stronger emotional abilities among younger faculty.

Since the p-value is well below the .05 significance threshold, Hypothesis H1 is fully supported, establishing that Emotional Intelligence differs significantly across Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z faculty members in aided colleges of Odisha. Further, Tukey’s post-hoc test was conducted to know which specific generational pairs differed significantly in their Emotional Intelligence (EI) scores.

Table 3: Tukey HSD Post-hoc Test for Emotional Intelligence (EI_Total)

Group Comparison	Mean Difference	Std. Error	p-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Gen X – Gen Y	-0.260	0.018	.001	-0.304	-0.216
Gen X – Gen Z	-0.405	0.020	.001	-0.455	-0.355
Gen Y – Gen Z	-0.145	0.018	.001	-0.189	-0.101

The results show clear and statistically significant differences among all three groups. The comparison between Generation X and Generation Y shows a mean difference of -0.260 ($p < .001$), indicating that Gen Y faculty have moderately higher EI than Gen X. The difference is statistically strong and practically meaningful. The comparison between Generation X and Generation Z yields a mean difference of -0.405 ($p < .001$), which is the *largest* gap among the three pairs. This finding confirms that Gen Z faculty members exhibit substantially higher Emotional Intelligence than their Gen X counterparts. The comparison between Generation Y and Generation Z shows a mean difference of -0.145 ($p < .001$). Although smaller than the previous two differences, this value is still statistically significant, suggesting that even between these two younger generations, EI continues to increase. All confidence intervals exclude zero, reinforcing that the differences observed are robust and unlikely to occur by chance. Overall, the post-hoc results strongly support the conclusion

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that Emotional Intelligence follows a clear ascending pattern across generations: Gen X < Gen Y < Gen Z. These findings further confirm Hypothesis H1 and strengthen the argument that generational experiences and evolving educational environments contribute to distinct emotional ability profiles among faculty in aided colleges of Odisha.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine whether Emotional Intelligence (EI) differs across three generations of faculty which are Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z in aided colleges of Odisha. The results clearly show that EI varies significantly among these generational groups, confirming the alternative hypothesis and rejecting the null hypothesis. The descriptive statistics revealed a consistent upward trend, with Generation Z recording the highest EI scores, followed by Generation Y, while Generation X showed comparatively lower EI levels. This pattern indicates a generational progression in emotional abilities.

The ANOVA result further strengthened this observation, showing a highly significant difference in EI across the generations ($p < .001$). The large F-value suggests that most of the variation in EI is explained by generational differences rather than random individual differences. The Tukey HSD post-hoc test confirmed that each pairwise comparison between Gen X vs Gen Y, Gen X vs Gen Z, and Gen Y vs Gen Z was statistically significant. This means EI increases meaningfully with each younger cohort. The results also align with studies suggesting that exposure to modern teaching methods and active-learning environments enhances emotional competencies among younger teachers. The significant differences revealed by the ANOVA and Tukey HSD tests reinforce the argument that EI is shaped by generational experiences and societal shifts, as suggested in the generational work of Cennamo and Gardner (2008) and Twenge et al. (2010).

Although this study focuses on generational differences, other factors such as gender, teaching experience, and academic discipline, which are known to influence Emotional Intelligence were not controlled for, and therefore the findings may contain elements of omitted variable bias. Overall, the study shows that Emotional Intelligence is strongly influenced by generational experiences. The clear progression from Gen X to Gen Z suggests that educational institutions should consider age-sensitive training, inter-generational mentoring, and EI-focused development programmes to create a more emotionally supportive and cohesive academic environment.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine whether Emotional Intelligence differs across Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z faculty members working in aided colleges of Odisha. The analysis clearly showed that Emotional Intelligence is not uniform across age groups. Instead, there is a consistent and significant increase in EI from the older generation to the youngest. Generation Z recorded the highest scores, followed by Generation Y, while Generation X displayed comparatively lower levels. The ANOVA and Tukey post-hoc results confirmed that all generational differences were statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. These findings suggest that socio-cultural changes, exposure to digital communication, modern teaching practices, and evolving educational environments have contributed to higher emotional abilities among younger faculty. The results also highlight that Emotional Intelligence is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the broader generational context in which teachers develop.

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For aided colleges in Odisha, this pattern indicates the need to strengthen emotional skills among mid-career and senior faculty while using the strengths of younger faculty through mentoring, teamwork, and collaborative tasks. Overall, the study demonstrates that understanding generational differences in Emotional Intelligence can help institutions build more supportive, adaptive, and emotionally aware academic environments.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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