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Research Paper

A Correlational Study Between Emotional Intelligence, Self-Esteem, and Career Decision Self-Efficacy Among Junior College Students

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ABSTRACT

The junior college years are a critical period for career decision-making, influenced by key psychological factors such as Emotional Intelligence (EI), Self-Esteem, and Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE). Even though these variables are significant, research examining them together in the Indian context is limited. This study examined their relationships among 122 students (aged 17–18) in Pune using standardized scales. Correlational and regression analyses were conducted. All EI dimensions showed significant positive correlations with self-esteem and CDSE ($p < .001$). Self-motivation had the strongest association with CDSE ($rs = .732$), while self-esteem showed a moderate correlation ($rs = .518$). Regression results identified self-motivation as the strongest predictor ($R^2 = .533$), followed by self-awareness, emotional stability, self-esteem, integrity, and commitment. Overall, the findings highlight the crucial role of emotional and motivational factors in shaping adolescent career confidence, with implications for career guidance practices.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Self-Esteem, Career Decision Self-Efficacy, Junior College Students, Adolescent Career Development, India*

Career decision-making represents one of the most psychologically significant challenges adolescents encounter during late secondary education. For students in Indian junior colleges broadly corresponding to the 11th and 12th standards, age 17 to 18 the requirement to decide which academic stream they want to pursue a career in. Choosing is not a seperate process, it comes alongside some of the most important changes in a young person's life. During this time, individuals are trying to understand who they are, what they value, and how they want to be seen by others. At the same, they are building friendships, seeking acceptance, and developing a sense of belonging within their Social world. Some students move through this process with a fair amount of confidence and clarity, while others find themselves stuck and feeling unsure, avoiding decisions, or simply going along with what others expect from them without really thinking it through. To understand these differences, it's important to look not just at external situations, but also the inner psychological factors that shape how individuals think, feel, and make decisions.

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Three such variables are particularly relevant to this question: Emotional Intelligence, Self-Esteem, and Career Decision Self-Efficacy. Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and deploy emotions effectively in oneself and in relation to others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). Self-esteem denotes the individual's overall evaluative stance toward the self the degree to which one regards oneself as competent, worthy, and deserving of respect (Rosenberg, 1965). Career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) is a domain-specific application of Bandura's (1977) general self-efficacy construct, defined as an individual's belief in their capacity to successfully execute the tasks constitutive of career decision-making (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

These three constructs share a theoretical linkage which reflects a clear directional relationship. Emotional intelligence provides the regulatory substrate that enables students to tolerate the uncertainty and inbuilt emotional response to high-stakes decision-making. Self-esteem furnishes the evaluative foundation, the sense that one is a capable and has worth from which confident decisional engagement can arise. CDSE is the direct belief that most directly governs whether a student initiates, sustains, and follows through with career exploration and commitment. Together, these variables form a connected set of mental processes that enables someone to adjust and grow in their career.

Despite theoretically consistent, there is limited research that examines these three constructs together within one empirical framework, especially in the junior college context. The present study was designed to address this gap by investigating the relationships among EI dimensions, self-esteem, and CDSE within a sample of junior college students in Pune, India. In doing so, it contributes to the growing literature on the psychological determinants of adolescent career development and provides actionable insights for counsellors and educators working in this developmental context.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been widely studied since Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (1990) conceptualised it as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions. Their four-branch model (1997) described EI as a hierarchy ranging from emotional perception to regulation. Daniel Goleman (1995, 1998) expanded this into a broader model including self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills, highlighting its role in life success. Other models, such as Reuven Bar-On's emotional-social intelligence and Konstantinos V. Petrides' trait EI, further refined the construct. Research consistently shows that EI is positively associated with academic performance, well-being, interpersonal functioning, and stress management. Studies in student populations indicate that emotional difficulties can hinder academic success, while higher EI contributes to better psychological and educational outcomes.

Self-esteem is another crucial psychological construct, defined by Morris Rosenberg (1965) as an individual's overall evaluation of self-worth. It influences motivation, resilience, and emotional experiences. Nathaniel Branden (1994) proposed that self-esteem consists of self-efficacy and self-worth, while Mark R. Leary and Roy F. Baumeister (1995) conceptualised it as a "sociometer" reflecting social acceptance. Empirical findings suggest that higher self-esteem is linked to better academic achievement, psychological adjustment, and adaptive coping. Individuals with high self-esteem respond more effectively to success and failure, and Indian studies also confirm its positive association with well-being and performance.

Career decision self-efficacy (CDSE), introduced by Karen M. Taylor and Nancy E. Betz (1983), is based on Albert Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. It refers to confidence in performing tasks related to career decision-making, such as self-appraisal, goal selection, and problem-solving. Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett (1994) incorporated CDSE into Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which explains how self-efficacy influences career interests and choices. Research shows that CDSE strongly predicts career exploration, commitment, and decision-making, making it a key factor in career development.

Research also highlights strong relationships among these constructs. EI is positively related to self-esteem, as individuals with better emotional regulation tend to maintain a more positive self-view. Studies indicate that emotional competencies help protect self-esteem from negative experiences and support its development over time. Similarly, EI is strongly linked to CDSE, as emotional regulation reduces anxiety and enhances confidence in decision-making. Self-motivation and self-awareness, in particular, have been found to significantly predict career confidence.

Self-esteem is also positively associated with CDSE, as individuals with a strong sense of self-worth are more likely to feel competent in making career decisions. However, research suggests that its influence is somewhat weaker compared to motivational aspects of EI.

Despite these findings, gaps remain. Most studies have examined these variables separately or in pairs, with limited research integrating all three within a single framework, particularly in the Indian context. Additionally, junior college students—who are at a critical stage of career decision-making—have received relatively little attention. The present study addresses these gaps by examining the relationships among EI, self-esteem, and CDSE in a unified framework among junior college students in Pune.

Objectives of the Study

The present study was designed to accomplish the following objectives:

- To investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence dimensions and self-esteem.
- To investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence dimensions and career decision self-efficacy.
- To investigate the relationship between self-esteem and career decision self-efficacy.

Hypotheses

Based on the review of literature and the theoretical framework, the following directional hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Self-awareness will be significantly and positively correlated with self-esteem.
- H2: Self-motivation will be significantly and positively correlated with self-esteem.
- H3: Emotional stability will be significantly and positively correlated with self-esteem.
- H4: Commitment will be significantly and positively correlated with self-esteem.
- H5: Integrity will be significantly and positively correlated with self-esteem.
- H6: Self-awareness will be significantly and positively correlated with career decision self-efficacy.

- H7: Self-motivation will be significantly and positively correlated with career decision self-efficacy.
- H8: Emotional stability will be significantly and positively correlated with career decision self-efficacy.
- H9: Commitment will be significantly and positively correlated with career decision self-efficacy.
- H10: Integrity will be significantly and positively correlated with career decision self-efficacy.
- H11: Self-esteem will be significantly and positively correlated with career decision self-efficacy.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative correlational research design was employed. This design is appropriate when the aim is to examine the nature, direction, and strength of relationships among these three variables without experimental manipulation.

Participants

The sample consisted of 122 junior college students (62 males, 60 females) drawn from educational institutions in Pune, Maharashtra, India. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 18 years and were enrolled in the 11th and 12th standards. The sample was represented different academic streams (Arts, Commerce, and Science). Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants provided written informed consent. Both Male and Female full-time students were included, only those with a self- reported history of major psychiatric or neurological disorders and those who repeating the year were excluded.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants met the specific inclusion criteria of the study: enrolment in junior college (11th or 12th standard), age between 17 and 18 years, and willingness to participate. This non-probability sampling method was selected because the focus of the study was on a clearly defined population with theoretically meaningful characteristics rather than generalization to the broader population.

Measures

- **Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS):** The Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Hyde, Pethe, and Dhar (2002) was used to assess emotional intelligence. The scale consists of 34 items rated on a five-point Likert format (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) and assesses ten dimensions: self-awareness (4 items), empathy (5 items), self-motivation (6 items), emotional stability (4 items), managing relations (4 items), integrity (3 items), self-development (2 items), value orientation (2 items), commitment (2 items), and altruistic behaviour (2 items). Total scores range from 34 to 170, with higher scores indicating greater emotional intelligence. The scale reports a split-half reliability coefficient of .88, indicating good internal consistency. For the purpose of this study, five theoretically central subscales — self-awareness, self-motivation, emotional stability, commitment, and integrity — were selected as the primary EI predictors.
- **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** Self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), a 10-item self-report instrument

that measures global self-worth. Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale, yielding a total score ranging from 0 to 30, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. The RSES demonstrates excellent psychometric properties, including a Guttman coefficient of reproducibility of .92 and test-retest reliability coefficients between .85 and .88 over two-week intervals. The scale has also demonstrated robust convergent and discriminant validity across numerous cultural and demographic contexts, including Indian student samples.

- **Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale — Short Form (CDSES-SF):** Career decision self-efficacy was measured using the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (Taylor & Betz, 1983), which assesses confidence across five career-choice competency domains: accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future, and problem-solving. The 25-item short form used in the present study employs a five-point confidence continuum (1 = No Confidence at All to 5 = Complete Confidence). Internal consistency for the short form ranges from .73 to .83 across subscales, with total score reliability of .94 (Betz et al., 1996). Test-retest reliability over a six-week interval has been reported at .83 (Luzzo, 1993). The scale has demonstrated strong content, concurrent, and construct validity across diverse student populations.

Procedure

Data was carried out in educational institutions in Pune with prior institutional approval.
The researcher-built rapport with participants before administering the questionnaires and provided clear oral and written instructions. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was maintained and participants were informed of their right to withdraw. The tools were administered in a group setting in a classroom. The procedure took approximately 25-30 minutes per participant. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness and accuracy before data entry.

Statistical Analysis

All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis were computed for all variables. The Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to assess distributional normality. Because significant deviations from normality were found for most variables, the non-parametric Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (rs) was used to examine pair wise relationships. Simple linear regression analyses were subsequently conducted to determine the independent predictive contribution of each EI dimension and self-esteem on CDSE. The alpha level was set at .05 for all inferential tests.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all study variables are presented in Table 1. Self-awareness recorded a relatively high mean (M = 16.61, SD = 3.02) with notable negative skewness (−1.836), indicating that most participants scored toward the upper end of the distribution. Self-motivation obtained the highest mean among EI subscales (M = 23.76, SD = 3.12) with near-zero skewness, reflecting a symmetrical and relatively consistent distribution of motivational tendencies. Emotional stability demonstrated a moderate-to-high mean (M = 15.88, SD = 2.76) with slight negative skewness. Commitment recorded the lowest mean with noticeable positive skewness (1.678) and high kurtosis (10.064), indicating that most participants showed lower commitment levels, with very few scoring extremely high.

Integrity scores were high and showed relatively low variability (M = 12.15, SD = 1.66). Self-esteem exhibited the widest spread among the non-career variables (M = 27.64, SD = 4.49), reflecting substantial individual variation in self-worth. Career decision self-efficacy demonstrated a high mean with considerable variability (M = 85.63, SD = 18.83), justifying its use as the primary outcome variable for inferential analysis.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for All Study Variables (N = 122)

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self-Awareness	16.61	3.02	-1.836	4.281
Self-Motivation	23.76	3.12	-.059	-.840
Emotional Stability	15.88	2.76	-.459	-.038
Commitment	8.42	2.10	1.678	10.064
Integrity	12.15	1.66	.037	.472
Self-Esteem	27.64	4.49	.207	.848
Career Decision Self-Efficacy	85.63	18.83	-.455	.395

Note. N = 122. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

Tests of Normality

The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated significant departures from normality for all variables, including self-awareness, self-motivation, emotional stability, commitment, integrity, and self-esteem ($p < .05$). Career decision self-efficacy also approached non-normality ($p = .050$). Therefore, non-parametric statistical analyses were used.

Table 2 Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality for All Study Variables (N = 122)

Variable	Statistic (W)	df	p
Self-Awareness	.825	122	< .001
Self-Motivation	.972	122	.011
Emotional Stability	.948	122	< .001
Commitment	.744	122	< .001
Integrity	.945	122	< .001
Self-Esteem	.968	122	.006
Career Decision Self-Efficacy	.979	122	.050

Note. Shapiro-Wilk test; df = degrees of freedom; p values < .05 indicate non-normal distribution.

Spearman's Correlations

Spearman's rank-order correlations were computed for all eleven hypothesised variable pairs. All correlations were statistically significant at $p < .001$ (see Table 3).

Regarding EI–self-esteem associations, commitment demonstrated the strongest positive correlation ($r_s = .460$), followed by self-motivation ($r_s = .438$), self-awareness ($r_s = .395$), integrity ($r_s = .372$), and emotional stability ($r_s = .317$). All five hypotheses concerning EI–self-esteem relationships (H1–H5) were therefore supported.

Regarding EI–CDSE associations, self-motivation yielded the strongest correlation in the entire study ($r_s = .732$), followed by self-awareness ($r_s = .686$), emotional stability ($r_s = .630$), commitment ($r_s = .620$), and integrity ($r_s = .518$). Hypotheses H6 through H10 were all supported. Self-esteem was also significantly and moderately positively correlated with CDSE ($r_s = .518$), supporting H11.

Table 3 Spearman's Rho Correlations Between Study Variables (N = 122)

Variable Pair	rs	p (two-tailed)
Self-Awareness & Self-Esteem	.395***	< .001
Self-Motivation & Self-Esteem	.438***	< .001
Emotional Stability & Self-Esteem	.317***	< .001
Commitment & Self-Esteem	.460***	< .001
Integrity & Self-Esteem	.372***	< .001
Self-Awareness & CDSE	.686***	< .001
Self-Motivation & CDSE	.732***	< .001
Emotional Stability & CDSE	.630***	< .001
Commitment & CDSE	.620***	< .001
Integrity & CDSE	.518***	< .001
Self-Esteem & CDSE	.518***	< .001

*Note. CDSE = Career Decision Self-Efficacy; rs = Spearman's rho. ***p < .001.*

Simple Linear Regression Analyses

Six simple linear regression analyses were conducted with each EI subscale and self-esteem as individual predictors of CDSE. Results are presented in Table 4. All six models were statistically significant (all Fs significant at $p < .001$).

Self-motivation was the strongest predictor of CDSE, accounting for 53.3% of the variance ($R^2 = .533$, $\beta = .730$, $F(1, 120) = 136.763$, $p < .001$). Self-awareness explained 34.4% of the variance ($R^2 = .344$, $\beta = .587$, $F(1, 120) = 62.995$, $p < .001$). Emotional stability accounted for 33.6% ($R^2 = .336$, $\beta = .580$, $F(1, 120) = 60.842$, $p < .001$). Self-esteem explained 31.4% of the variance ($R^2 = .314$, $\beta = .560$, $F(1, 120) = 54.931$, $p < .001$). Integrity accounted for 21.4% ($R^2 = .214$, $\beta = .462$, $F(1, 120) = 32.608$, $p < .001$). Commitment was the weakest predictor, explaining 11.4% of the variance ($R^2 = .114$, $\beta = .338$, $F(1, 120) = 15.497$, $p < .001$). Because these were simple (rather than multiple) regression models, each R^2 value reflects the isolated predictive contribution of a single predictor and should be interpreted as such.

Table 4 Summary of Simple Regression Analyses Predicting Career Decision Self-Efficacy (N = 122)

Predictor	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	B	SE B	β	t	F	p
Self-Awareness	.587	.344	.339	3.657	.461	.587	7.937	62.995	< .001
Self-Motivation	.730	.533	.529	4.406	.377	.730	11.695	136.763	< .001
Emotional Stability	.580	.336	.331	3.951	.507	.580	7.800	60.842	< .001
Commitment	.338	.114	.107	3.028	.769	.338	3.937	15.497	< .001
Integrity	.462	.214	.207	5.246	.919	.462	5.710	32.608	< .001
Self-Esteem	.560	.314	.308	2.349	.317	.560	7.412	54.931	< .001

Note. Outcome variable = Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE); B = unstandardized coefficient; SE B = standard error; β = standardized coefficient. All models: N = 122.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationships among emotional intelligence (EI), self-esteem, and career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) among junior college students. All hypothesised relationships were found to be significant, indicating a consistent and theoretically meaningful pattern. These findings are in line with existing literature and reinforce the combined role of emotional and self-evaluative factors in career development.

Emotional Intelligence and Self-Esteem

All EI dimensions show positive and significant relationship with Self Esteem. Among them, Commitment had the strongest association while Emotional Stability had the weakest. This suggests that individuals who are more involved, focused on goals and are aware of their emotions tend to positively evaluate themselves. Self-Awareness contributes by helping individuals understand themselves more accurately, while Commitment may strengthen identity and purpose. Emotional Stability appears to affect self-esteem indirectly by lowering negative emotional experiences rather than directly increasing positive self-evaluation.

Emotional Intelligence and CDSE

EI demonstrated stronger associations with CDSE than with self-esteem, highlighting its important role in career decision. Self-Motivation was the strongest predictor, indicating that individuals who are internally driven by are more likely to engage in career exploration and despite uncertainty. Self-awareness also showed a strong association with CDSE, indicating that understanding one's abilities and preferences supports confident decisions. Emotional Stability further helps individuals to manage stress and anxiety during decision making process. Overall, the findings highlight the importance emotional control and motivation in building career decision.

Self-Esteem and CDSE

Self-esteem was moderately and positively associated with CDSE, indicating that individuals with higher self-worth tend to feel more confident in making career decisions. However, its influence was comparatively weaker than that of EI dimensions, particularly self-motivation. This suggests that while self-esteem provides a general sense of competence and worth, it may not directly translate into action-oriented confidence required for specific career tasks.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings indicate that motivational and self-regulatory components of emotional intelligence play a more significant role in predicting CDSE than general self-esteem. Career decision-making appears to depend more on individuals' ability to regulate emotions, sustain motivation, and engage actively with decision-making tasks, rather than solely on their overall self-evaluation.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that emotional intelligence and self-esteem are significant psychological determinants of career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) among junior college students, with all hypotheses supported. Regression findings indicate that self-motivation, self-awareness, emotional stability, self-esteem, integrity, and commitment each contribute significantly to CDSE, with self-motivation emerging as the strongest predictor.

These findings highlight that career confidence is not solely dependent on occupational knowledge or skills, but is strongly influenced by emotional and motivational competencies, particularly the ability to regulate emotions and sustain goal-directed behavior.

Overall, the study supports an integrated framework linking emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and career decision-making, and provides meaningful insights within the Indian junior college context, where research in this area remains limited.

Implications

The findings have important practical and theoretical implications. Self-motivation emerged as the strongest predictor of career decision self-efficacy (CDSE), suggesting that interventions focusing on intrinsic motivation and goal orientation can significantly enhance career confidence. Schools and counsellors should integrate emotional literacy programmes—emphasising self-awareness, emotional regulation, and motivation—into career guidance rather than focusing solely on information or skills.

The significant role of self-esteem highlights the need for interventions that promote self-worth, particularly for students at risk of career indecision. Group-based approaches fostering self-acceptance, identity clarity, and goal commitment may be especially beneficial.

Theoretically, the findings support the integration of emotional intelligence with Social Cognitive Career Theory and self-efficacy frameworks, demonstrating that motivational and emotional competencies are key contributors to career development, particularly within the Indian context.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. First, the sample size (N = 122), while adequate, limits generalisability; future studies should include larger and more diverse samples. Second, purposive sampling may introduce selection bias, as participants may not represent the broader population. Third, the use of self-report measures increases the risk of social desirability bias and shared method variance. Fourth, the correlational design prevents causal conclusions, and relationships may be bidirectional. Fifth, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits understanding of changes over time. Finally, only selected EI subscales were examined, which may restrict the comprehensiveness of findings.

Suggestions For Future Research

Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how changes in EI and self-esteem influence CDSE over time. Experimental studies are needed to establish causal relationships, particularly through intervention-based approaches. Larger and more representative samples, including rural and semi-urban populations, would improve generalisability. Additionally, examining mediating and moderating variables such as parental influence, academic stream, socioeconomic status, and gender would provide deeper insights. Including all EI dimensions and related constructs like career adaptability and vocational identity would further strengthen the research framework.

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Conflict of Interest

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