

Social Intelligence, Self-Awareness, and Social Cognition among Postgraduate Students in Telangana

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the dimensions of social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition among postgraduate students in Telangana, with specific reference to Osmania University and its affiliated colleges. A sample of 360 students was selected through simple random sampling from institutions including the Osmania campus, Koti Women's College, Nizam College, PG College Saifabad, and PG College Secunderabad. Employing a descriptive research design, data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed through SPSS. The findings reveal a balanced demographic profile, with equal representation of male and female students and diverse academic disciplines. Social intelligence emerged as a multidimensional construct: students demonstrated strengths in patience, sensitivity, confidence, and memory, while weaknesses were evident in cooperativeness and recognition of the social environment. Self-awareness was moderately developed, with most students acknowledging its role in professional growth and emotional adjustment, though gaps in self-concept persisted. Social cognition showed promise, as students recognized its importance in interpreting social situations and perceptions of the world. However, difficulties in identifying emotions and tendencies toward dichotomous thinking highlighted challenges in interpersonal understanding. Overall, the study underscores the need for higher education institutions to integrate social and emotional learning into postgraduate curricula. By fostering collaboration, reflective practices, and cognitive flexibility, universities can enhance holistic student development, preparing graduates for both academic success and meaningful societal participation.

Keywords: Social Intelligence; Self-Awareness; Social Cognition; Postgraduate Students; Higher Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary academic landscape, postgraduate education represents a critical stage in the intellectual and personal development of students (Steur et al., 2016). Beyond the acquisition of advanced disciplinary knowledge, this phase is characterized by the cultivation of social, emotional, and cognitive competencies that shape students' ability to navigate complex interpersonal environments and professional challenges (Mayang, 2025). Among these competencies, social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition have emerged as pivotal constructs that influence not only academic achievement but also broader life outcomes.

Social intelligence, as conceptualized by Thorndike and later expanded by Goleman, refers to the ability to understand and manage social interactions effectively. It encompasses traits such as patience, cooperativeness, confidence, sensitivity, tactfulness, and humour, all of which contribute to successful interpersonal functioning. In the context of postgraduate education, social intelligence plays a vital role in collaborative learning, peer engagement, and professional networking (Blanken-Webb, 2017). Students who demonstrate high levels of social intelligence are better equipped to adapt to diverse academic environments, resolve conflicts, and build meaningful relationships that support their academic and career trajectories (Tessema, 2025).

Closely related to social intelligence is self-awareness, which involves the capacity to recognize one's emotions, strengths, limitations, and values. Self-awareness is fundamental to emotional regulation, identity formation, and professional growth (Kour & Bhatia, 2025). For postgraduate students, who often face heightened academic pressures and transitional challenges, self-awareness serves as a protective factor that enhances resilience and adaptability (Ellis et al., 2017). It enables students to reflect critically on their experiences, adjust to changing circumstances, and pursue personal and professional goals with clarity and confidence.

Social cognition, the third construct examined in this study, refers to the processes by which individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to social stimuli (Fiske & Taylor, 2020). It includes the ability to understand others' emotions, thoughts, and intentions, as well as the capacity to process complex social

situations. Social cognition is essential for empathy, communication, and collaborative problem-solving (Fiebich, 2017). In academic settings, it influences how students engage in group discussions, interpret feedback, and navigate diverse cultural contexts. Deficits in social cognition can lead to misunderstandings, social isolation, and reduced effectiveness in interpersonal interactions, thereby impacting academic performance and psychological well-being (Giusti et al., 2021).

The relevance of these constructs is particularly pronounced in the Indian higher education context, where postgraduate students are exposed to diverse academic disciplines, cultural backgrounds, and institutional environments. Telangana, with its rich educational heritage, provides a unique setting for examining these dimensions. Osmania University and its affiliated colleges, including the Osmania campus, Koti Women's College, Nizam College, PG College Saifabad, and PG College Secunderabad, attract students from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This diversity creates both opportunities and challenges for students' social and psychological development.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition, empirical research in the Indian context remains limited. Most studies have focused on cognitive and academic outcomes, with relatively less attention to the social and emotional dimensions of postgraduate education. This study seeks to address this gap by systematically examining these constructs among postgraduate students in Telangana. By analysing demographic, socio-economic, and psychological variables, the research provides insights into the strengths and weaknesses of students' social and cognitive competencies, thereby contributing to both theoretical understanding and practical interventions.

The findings of this study hold significant implications for educators, policymakers, and institutions. They highlight the need to integrate social and emotional learning into postgraduate curricula, foster reflective practices, and provide structured opportunities for collaborative engagement. In doing so, higher education can move beyond the transmission of knowledge to nurture holistic development, preparing students not only for academic success but also for meaningful participation in society.

II. OBJECTIVES AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to examine the levels of social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition among postgraduate students in Telangana, with specific reference to Osmania University and its affiliated colleges. The study seeks to identify the strengths and weaknesses in these dimensions, analyse their relationship with demographic and socio-economic variables, and interpret their implications for academic achievement and personal development (Casanova et al., 2005). By doing so, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social competencies that shape students' experiences in higher education.

The importance of the study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on student development by integrating social and emotional constructs into the analysis of postgraduate education. Practically, it offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and institutions in designing interventions that foster holistic development. In the Indian context, where higher education is undergoing rapid expansion and diversification, the study underscores the need to move beyond cognitive outcomes to address the social and emotional dimensions of learning (Aithal & Maiya, 2023; Zainab, 2023). By highlighting the role of social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition, the research emphasizes that academic success and professional readiness are inseparable from social-emotional competence.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Telangana, focusing on postgraduate students enrolled in Osmania University and its affiliated colleges, namely the Osmania campus, Koti Women's College, Nizam College, PG College Saifabad, and PG College Secunderabad. A total of 360 postgraduate students constituted the sample, selected through the simple random sampling method to ensure representativeness and minimize bias.

The research employed a descriptive research design, which is appropriate for examining the existing conditions and characteristics of the population without manipulating variables. Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire, designed to capture demographic information as well as dimensions of social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition. The questionnaire included items related to patience, cooperativeness, confidence, sensitivity, tactfulness, humour, memory, emotional adjustment, and perception of social situations.

The collected data were systematically coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were employed to summarize the data, while interpretive analysis was conducted to identify patterns and insights.

IV. RESULTS

The present study sought to examine the social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition of postgraduate students across diverse academic disciplines. The results presented here provide a comprehensive overview of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, followed by their psychological and social dimensions. By analysing variables such as gender, age, and branch of study, alongside traits including patience, cooperativeness, confidence, sensitivity, tactfulness, and memory, the findings offer valuable insights into the social and emotional competencies of students in higher education. The results are organized to reflect three major domains: social intelligence, which encompasses interpersonal skills and adaptive behaviours (Boyatzis et al., 2015); self-awareness, which relates to emotional regulation and self-concept; and social cognition, which highlights the processes of perceiving, interpreting, and responding to social situations (Frith & Frith, 2007). Together, these dimensions provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and strengths experienced by postgraduate students, thereby laying the foundation for further discussion and interpretation in the subsequent sections.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample consisted of 360 postgraduate students, equally divided between male (50%) and female (50%) participants, ensuring gender balance in the study. Representation across academic disciplines was also evenly distributed, with Arts & Humanities, Science, and Commerce & Management each accounting for 33.33% of the respondents. Age-wise, the majority of students (61%) were in the 20–25 years category, followed by 24% in the 26–30 years group, and 15% aged 30 years and above. This distribution indicates that most respondents were young adults in the early stages of their postgraduate journey, a phase often marked by evolving social and psychological development.

Social Intelligence Dimensions

The analysis of social intelligence revealed varied strengths and challenges among students. Patience emerged as a strong trait, with more than half (53%) reporting a high degree of patience, while only 19% showed low levels. In contrast, cooperativeness was relatively weak, with a majority (56%) scoring low, suggesting difficulties in collaborative engagement. Confidence levels were encouraging, as nearly half (48%) reported high confidence, though 34% still struggled with low confidence.

Sensitivity was another strong dimension, with 58% of students scoring high, reflecting their ability to respond empathetically to social cues. However, recognition of the social environment was limited, as nearly half (49%) reported low awareness of their surroundings. Traits such as tactfulness and sense of humour were moderately developed, with most students falling in the average range (49% and 55% respectively). Memory skills were also predominantly moderate (58%), with 30% reporting high memory retention. These findings suggest that while students demonstrate patience, sensitivity, and confidence, they face challenges in cooperativeness and environmental recognition—critical aspects of social intelligence.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness was found to be moderately developed among respondents. A majority (64%) reported average patience in self-awareness, while only 14% demonstrated high levels. Importantly, 61.6% agreed that self-awareness helps professional growth, and 54.2% acknowledged its role in emotional adjustment with the environment. However, perceptions of self-image were mixed: while 50.3% agreed that self-awareness reflects one's picture of oneself, 29.2% disagreed, indicating a lack of clarity in self-concept among a significant portion of students.

Furthermore, 59.4% agreed that self-awareness aids in understanding complex human behaviour, highlighting its importance in social adaptability. Yet, nearly one-third of students expressed disagreement in several aspects, suggesting that self-awareness is not uniformly internalized across the sample.

Social Cognition

Social cognition, which relates to how individuals perceive and interpret social situations, showed promising results. More than half (53%) reported average patience in social cognition, while 25% demonstrated high levels. A strong majority (66.7%) agreed that social cognition helps in determining perceptions of the world, and 63.1% recognized it as a process of understanding social situations.

However, challenges were evident in specific areas. While 49.4% acknowledged the role of perceiving and processing social stimuli in interactions, 22.5% disagreed, reflecting gaps in interpretive skills. Notably, 56.1% admitted difficulties in identifying others' emotions, thoughts, and intentions, underscoring a critical area of concern. Dichotomous thinking was also prevalent, with 46.6% agreeing and 40.3% disagreeing, suggesting polarized cognitive patterns among students.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the dimensions of social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition among postgraduate students across diverse academic disciplines. The findings reveal a complex interplay of strengths and challenges that characterize the psychological and social development of young adults in higher education. This discussion interprets the results in light of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and practical implications, thereby situating the study within the broader discourse on student development and academic achievement.

Demographic Context and Its Implications

The demographic profile of respondents shows a balanced representation of male and female students, as well as equal distribution across Arts & Humanities, Science, and Commerce & Management. This balance strengthens the generalizability of the findings, as gender and disciplinary biases are minimized. The predominance of students aged 20–25 years highlights the transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood, a period often marked by identity formation, social adaptation, and psychological challenges (Marcia, 2010). Erikson's psychosocial theory emphasizes that young adults grapple with the stage of "intimacy versus isolation," where social intelligence and self-awareness play critical roles in establishing meaningful relationships and professional identities. The age distribution in this study aligns with this developmental stage, underscoring the relevance of examining social and cognitive competencies among postgraduate students.

Social Intelligence: Strengths and Weaknesses

Social intelligence, defined as the ability to understand and manage social interactions effectively (Lievens & Chan, 2017), emerged as a multidimensional construct in this study. The high levels of patience (53%) and sensitivity (58%) among students suggest that they are capable of empathetic engagement and emotional regulation. These traits are essential for fostering positive peer relationships, collaborative learning, and resilience in academic settings (Wentzel & Watkins, 2002). Patience, in particular, reflects the ability to tolerate stress and delays, which is crucial in the demanding environment of postgraduate education.

Confidence also emerged as a strong dimension, with nearly half of the students reporting high levels. Confidence is closely linked to self-efficacy, which Bandura (1997) identifies as a determinant of motivation and performance. Students with high confidence are more likely to participate actively in academic and social activities (Clark & Gakuru, 2014), thereby enhancing their learning outcomes and interpersonal relationships.

However, the findings also reveal significant weaknesses in cooperativeness and recognition of the social environment. More than half of the respondents (56%) reported low cooperativeness, indicating difficulties in teamwork and collaborative problem-solving. This is concerning, as higher education increasingly emphasizes group projects, peer learning, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Low cooperativeness may hinder students' ability to adapt to these pedagogical approaches and limit their professional growth in team-oriented workplaces.

Similarly, nearly half of the students (49%) reported low recognition of the social environment, suggesting limited situational awareness and contextual understanding. This weakness may affect their ability to navigate complex social settings, interpret non-verbal cues, and respond appropriately to diverse cultural contexts (Nur Azizah et al., 2023). Goleman's (1995) framework of emotional intelligence highlights social awareness as a critical component of effective interpersonal functioning. The lack of environmental recognition among students points to a gap that needs to be addressed through targeted interventions such as social skills training and experiential learning.

Moderate levels of tactfulness and sense of humour further illustrate the nuanced profile of students' social intelligence. While these traits are not as critical as patience or confidence, they contribute to the overall quality of social interactions (Lopes et al., 2003). Humour, for instance, has been shown to reduce stress and foster group cohesion, while tactfulness enhances conflict resolution and diplomacy. The predominance of moderate scores suggests that students possess these traits to some extent but may benefit from opportunities to refine them.

Self-Awareness: A Moderately Developed Construct

Self-awareness, which involves understanding one's emotions, strengths, and limitations, was found to be moderately developed among respondents. A majority (64%) reported average patience in self-awareness, while only 14% demonstrated high levels. This indicates that while students are aware of their emotional states, few have achieved a deeper level of introspection and self-regulation.

The perception of self-awareness as a tool for professional growth was widely acknowledged, with 61.6% agreeing to its importance. This reflects an understanding among students that self-awareness contributes to career development, leadership, and adaptability. Similarly, 54.2% recognized its role in

emotional adjustment with the environment, highlighting its relevance in coping with stress and interpersonal challenges.

However, mixed perceptions were observed regarding self-image and self-concept. While 50.3% agreed that self-awareness reflects one's picture of oneself, nearly 30% disagreed, suggesting a lack of clarity in self-concept among a significant portion of students. This ambiguity may stem from the transitional nature of postgraduate education, where students are negotiating multiple identities—academic, professional, and personal. Theories of identity development, such as Marcia's (1966) identity status model, emphasize that young adults often experience "moratorium" or exploration before achieving identity commitment. The mixed responses in this study may reflect this developmental process.

The recognition of self-awareness in understanding complex human behaviour (59.4%) further underscores its importance in social adaptability. Students who are self-aware are better equipped to interpret others' actions, empathize with diverse perspectives, and engage in constructive social interactions (McNaughton, 2016). However, the presence of disagreement among nearly one-third of respondents indicates that self-awareness is not uniformly internalized, pointing to the need for structured interventions such as reflective practices, counselling, and mentorship.

Social Cognition: Promise and Challenges

Social cognition, which refers to the processes of perceiving, interpreting, and responding to social stimuli (Beaudoin & Beauchamp, 2020), showed promising results in this study. A majority of students acknowledged its role in determining perceptions of the world (66.7%) and understanding social situations (63.1%). These findings align with theories of social learning, which emphasize that cognition shapes behaviour in social contexts. Students who recognize the importance of social cognition are likely to engage more effectively in academic discussions, group projects, and professional networking (Ouyang et al., 2021).

However, challenges were evident in specific areas. While 49.4% acknowledged the role of perceiving and processing social stimuli in interactions, 22.5% disagreed, reflecting gaps in interpretive skills. More critically, 56.1% admitted difficulties in identifying others' emotions, thoughts, and intentions. This finding is significant, as the ability to understand others' mental states—often referred to as "theory of mind"—is essential for empathy, communication, and conflict resolution. Difficulties in this area may lead to misunderstandings, social isolation, and reduced effectiveness in collaborative settings.

Dichotomous thinking was also prevalent, with 46.6% agreeing and 40.3% disagreeing. Dichotomous thinking, or "black-and-white" thinking, reflects cognitive rigidity and limited tolerance for ambiguity. In academic and professional contexts, such thinking may hinder critical analysis, creativity, and adaptability (Gube & Lajoie, 2020). The presence of dichotomous thinking among students suggests the need for pedagogical approaches that encourage nuanced reasoning, perspective-taking, and problem-solving.

Integrative Analysis

Taken together, the findings reveal a profile of postgraduate students characterized by strengths in patience, sensitivity, confidence, and memory, alongside weaknesses in cooperativeness, environmental recognition, and interpretive skills. This profile reflects the developmental challenges of young adults navigating higher education, where social and cognitive competencies are tested in diverse contexts.

The interplay between social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition is particularly noteworthy. High patience and sensitivity in social intelligence complement self-awareness in emotional adjustment, while confidence supports social cognition in interpreting social situations (Boyatzis et al., 2019). Conversely, weaknesses in cooperativeness and environmental recognition may undermine the benefits of self-awareness and social cognition, leading to gaps in interpersonal functioning. This integrative perspective highlights the need for holistic interventions that address multiple dimensions simultaneously.

Implications for Higher Education

The findings have several implications for higher education. First, the weaknesses in cooperativeness and environmental recognition suggest the need for pedagogical strategies that emphasize collaborative learning and situational awareness (Katherasala et al., 2023). Group projects, peer mentoring, and experiential learning can provide opportunities for students to develop these skills (Devi et al., 2023). Second, the mixed perceptions of self-awareness highlight the importance of reflective practices, counselling, and mentorship in fostering deeper introspection and identity development. Third, the challenges in social cognition, particularly in identifying emotions and dichotomous thinking, call for interventions that enhance empathy, perspective-taking, and cognitive flexibility (Healey & Grossman, 2018). Role-playing, case studies, and intercultural exchanges can be effective in this regard.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition among postgraduate students. By highlighting the strengths and weaknesses in these dimensions, it provides empirical support for theories of emotional intelligence, identity development, and social learning. The findings underscore the importance of integrating psychological and social competencies into higher education curricula, thereby bridging the gap between academic achievement and holistic development.

Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases, as students may overestimate or underestimate their competencies. Future research could incorporate observational methods, peer assessments, and experimental designs to validate the findings. Additionally, the study was conducted in a specific cultural and institutional context, which may limit its generalizability. Comparative studies across different regions and educational systems could provide a broader understanding of student development. Finally, longitudinal research is needed to examine how social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition evolve over time and influence academic and professional outcomes.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined the social intelligence, self-awareness, and social cognition of postgraduate students, offering a comprehensive view of their psychological and social competencies. The findings reveal that students possess notable strengths in patience, sensitivity, confidence, and memory, which are essential for resilience, empathy, and academic success. At the same time, weaknesses in cooperativeness, recognition of the social environment, and interpretive skills highlight areas that require structured support. Self-awareness was moderately developed, with many students acknowledging its role in professional growth and emotional adjustment, though gaps in self-concept and clarity of identity remain. Social cognition emerged as a promising domain, yet difficulties in identifying emotions and tendencies toward dichotomous thinking suggest challenges in interpersonal understanding.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of nurturing holistic development in higher education. Universities must go beyond academic instruction to foster collaboration, reflective practices, and cognitive flexibility among students. By integrating social and emotional learning into curricula, institutions can prepare students not only for academic achievement but also for meaningful participation in society. The research contributes to theoretical discourse and offers practical implications for educators and policymakers, emphasizing that intellectual growth and social-emotional competence are inseparable in shaping future leaders and professionals.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. Furthermore, this research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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