



Flow And Emotional Intelligence In Relation To Life Satisfaction: An Indian College Student Perspective

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Abstract:

The pursuit of happiness and psychological well-being has become a central theme in modern psychology, particularly within the framework of positive psychology. Constructs such as flow, emotional intelligence, and life satisfaction are increasingly recognized as vital determinants of subjective well-being. Flow, introduced by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), refers to a state of deep immersion in an activity, characterized by intrinsic motivation, concentration, and a loss of self-consciousness. Emotional intelligence, popularized by Goleman (1995), encompasses the ability to perceive, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively, thereby influencing interpersonal relationships, academic performance, and coping strategies. Life satisfaction, as defined by Diener et al. (1985), is a cognitive evaluation of one's overall quality of life and is influenced by both internal and external factors. Although these constructs have been studied extensively in Western contexts, their combined influence on young adults in collectivist societies such as India remains underexplored. This study investigates the relationships among flow, emotional intelligence, and life satisfaction in Indian college students. Results revealed significant positive correlations between flow and emotional intelligence, and between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction. Regression analysis confirmed that emotional intelligence and flow jointly predict life satisfaction, though flow alone did not significantly correlate with life satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of emotional regulation and optimal experience in enhancing subjective well-being, while also emphasizing cultural nuances in collectivist societies. The study contributes to cross-cultural psychology by demonstrating that emotional intelligence is a stronger predictor of life satisfaction than flow alone, suggesting that interventions aimed at improving emotional intelligence may be particularly effective in Indian educational contexts.

Keywords: Flow, Emotional Intelligence, Life Satisfaction, Positive Psychology, Well-being, Indian College students, Psychological Engagement, Ex-post facto Research Design, Cross-Cultural Psychology

Introduction:

Positive psychology emphasizes the study of human strengths, optimal functioning, and well-being. Within this framework, three constructs:-flow, emotional intelligence, and life satisfaction have gained prominence. Flow, as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), is a state of complete absorption in an activity where individuals lose track of time and experience intrinsic enjoyment. Emotional intelligence, introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and later popularized by Goleman (1995), refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others. Life satisfaction, defined by Diener et al. (1985), is a global cognitive judgment of one's quality of life.

These constructs are interrelated. Flow experiences often enhance emotional regulation, while emotional intelligence contributes to resilience and interpersonal harmony, both of which influence life satisfaction. However, most research has been conducted in Western contexts, where individualistic values dominate. In collectivist societies such as India, where family, community, and cultural traditions play a central role, the dynamics among these constructs may differ. This study seeks to explore these relationships in Indian college students, thereby contributing to culturally grounded psychology.

Review of Literature:

Flow has been linked to creativity, motivation, and academic engagement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Emotional intelligence has been associated with academic success, stress management, and interpersonal relationships (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004; Bar-On, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Life satisfaction has been studied as a global measure of well-being, influenced by personality traits, social relationships, and cultural context (Diener et al., 1985; Veenhoven, 1996).

Kong and Zhao (2012) found that emotional intelligence predicts life satisfaction in young adults, mediated by positive affect. Özyer et al. (1998) reported similar findings in Turkish populations. Shernoff et al. (2003) demonstrated that flow enhances academic engagement, while Chen et al. (2010) linked flow to creativity and well-being. In India, limited research has examined these constructs together, highlighting the need for culturally specific studies.

Research Objectives:

1. To determine whether flow is positively correlated with emotional intelligence among Indian college students.
2. To assess whether flow is positively correlated with life satisfaction.
3. To examine whether emotional intelligence is positively correlated with life satisfaction.
4. To investigate whether flow and emotional intelligence jointly predict life satisfaction.

Research Design

The study employed a **casual-comparative (ex post facto) design**, as the variables under investigation: flow, emotional intelligence, and life satisfaction already exist naturally in participants and cannot be manipulated directly. This design is appropriate for identifying associations and predictive relationships among variables without experimental intervention.

Data were collected using standardized psychological scales administered online. The Flow State Scale (Jackson & Eklund, 2002) measures the depth and frequency of flow experiences. The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (Schutte et al., 1998) assesses emotional perception, regulation, and utilization. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) evaluates overall life satisfaction. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics to summarize participant scores, Pearson correlation to test relationships among variables, and regression analysis to examine predictive validity.

Sample Size

The sample consisted of 100 college students aged 18–25 years, selected through purposive sampling. Participants were recruited from urban universities in Bangalore and Hyderabad. Inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs and to provide informed consent. Exclusion criteria included individuals with diagnosed psychological disorders or those unwilling to participate.

Analysis and Discussion

Correlation Results

- H1 supported: Flow and emotional intelligence showed a significant positive correlation ($r = .42$, $p < .01$).
- H2 not supported: Flow and life satisfaction correlation was weak and not statistically significant ($r = .12$, $p > .05$).
- H3 supported: Emotional intelligence and life satisfaction showed a strong positive correlation ($r = .51$, $p < .01$).
- H4 supported: Regression analysis confirmed that emotional intelligence and flow jointly predict life satisfaction ($R^2 = .38$, $p < .01$), with emotional intelligence being the stronger predictor.

Table 1: Key Findings

Hypotheses	Variables Tested	Result	Significance
H1	Flow ↔ Emotional Intelligence	Supported	$r = .42$, $p < .01$
H2	Flow ↔ Life Satisfaction	Not Supported	$r = .12$, $p > .05$
H3	EI ↔ Life Satisfaction	Supported	$r = .51$, $p < .01$
H4	Flow + EI → Life Satisfaction	Supported	$R^2 = .38$, $p < .01$

Limitations and Future Directions:

The study was limited by its sample size (100 students) and urban focus, which may not generalize to rural populations. Reliance on self-report measures introduces potential bias. Future research should expand to larger, more diverse samples and integrate longitudinal designs to explore causal pathways. Additionally, incorporating vernacular tools and examining digital-age influences could enrich understanding of how flow and emotional intelligence interact with life satisfaction in contemporary India.

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