


Emotional Intelligence and Adjustment among Students: Implications for Educational Equity

Sahanaz khatun  Jakir Hussain Laskar 

Department of Education, Aliah University, Park circus campus, Kolkata

*Corresponding author: sahanaz.edu.rs@aliah.ac.in

Abstract

In the contemporary digital era, where communication is increasingly mediated by technology, the development of emotional competencies has become essential for students' psychological well-being and academic success. This paper examines the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and student adjustment, with particular emphasis on educational equity. Drawing on existing literature, the study highlights how emotionally intelligent students demonstrate better social, emotional, and academic adjustment. Emotional intelligence enhances self-regulation, interpersonal skills, and resilience, enabling students to cope effectively with academic and social challenges. The review further underscores the role of equitable educational environments in supporting diverse learners by addressing their varied needs. By synthesizing findings from empirical and theoretical studies, this paper argues that emotional intelligence is a key factor in promoting adjustment and fostering inclusive educational outcomes. The study contributes to ongoing discussions on student development, mental well-being, and equity in education.

Keywords

Adjustment, Emotional Intelligence, Equity in education, Equity vs Equality, Secondary school students

Article History

Received: 21 January 2026

Revised: 17 April 2026

Accepted: 19 April 2026

Published: 27 April 2026

Citation

Khatun, S., Laskar, J.H. (2026). Emotional Intelligence and Adjustment among Students: Implications for Educational Equity. *S3R Academia*, 3(1), 38-50. <https://doi.org/10.70682/s3r.2026.04>

1. Introduction

Education is a dynamic and holistic process that plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' cognitive, emotional, and social development. Beyond the acquisition of knowledge, it fosters adaptability, self-regulation, and the formation of a balanced personality capable of responding effectively to diverse life situations. In an increasingly complex and technology-driven world, students are required not only to develop intellectual abilities but also to cultivate emotional competencies that enable them to navigate academic, social, and personal challenges successfully. In this context, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has emerged as a significant construct in understanding student development. As Daniel Goleman emphasizes,

emotional skills often play a more decisive role than cognitive intelligence in determining success, well-being, and long-term achievement.

“What really matters for success, character, happiness and lifelong achievements is a definite set of emotional skills - your EQ - not just purely cognitive abilities that are measured by conventional IQ tests.” - Daniel Goleman

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and effectively utilize emotions in oneself and others. It enhances interpersonal relationships, promotes effective communication, and supports resilience in the face of stress and adversity. Consequently, students with higher levels of Emotional Intelligence are better equipped to manage academic pressures, maintain social relationships, and achieve overall well-being.

Closely related to Emotional Intelligence is the concept of Adjustment, which originates from Darwinian ideas of adaptation. Adjustment refers to an individual’s ability to cope with environmental demands, maintain psychological balance, and function effectively within social contexts. In educational settings, Adjustment is particularly significant during adolescence, a period marked by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes. During this stage, students often experience confusion, stress, and identity-related challenges, which may lead to maladjustment if adequate emotional and social support is not provided. Therefore, the ability to adjust effectively is essential for students’ academic success and psychological stability.

Equally important in this discourse is the concept of Educational Equity, which emphasizes fairness and inclusivity in providing learning opportunities. Unlike equality, which treats all learners the same, equity recognizes individual differences and ensures that students receive the support they need based on their unique circumstances. In diverse educational contexts, equitable systems create enabling environments that address socio-economic, cultural, and individual disparities, thereby promoting meaningful participation and success for all learners.

Although Emotional Intelligence, Adjustment, and Educational Equity have been widely studied, these constructs are often examined independently. There remains a need to understand how Emotional Intelligence contributes to students’ Adjustment within equitable educational frameworks. Addressing this gap is essential for developing holistic educational practices that support both academic achievement and emotional well-being.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and student Adjustment.
2. To analyze the role of Emotional Intelligence in enhancing students’ social, emotional, and academic well-being.
3. To explore the significance of educational equity in supporting student adjustment.
4. To understand how emotionally intelligent individuals contribute to inclusive and equitable learning environments.

2. Literature Review

Research on Emotional Intelligence (EI) and student Adjustment highlights a strong relationship between Emotional competence, academic performance, and Adaptability. Early studies established EI as a key predictor of Adjustment. Abdullah et al. (2009) found that Emotional Intelligence significantly influences social adjustment among university students, while Adeyemo (2005) identified EI as a buffering factor that enhances students' ability to cope during transitional stages. These findings emphasize the role of emotional regulation in managing academic and social challenges.

Subsequent studies examined how demographic and contextual variables shape adjustment. Basu (2012) and Alam (2018) reported significant differences in Adjustment based on gender, school type, and locality, indicating that Adjustment is influenced by both personal and environmental factors. Similarly, Kumari and Kamala (2022) highlighted the importance of supportive home and school environments in improving students' Adjustment and academic performance. Institutional context also plays a role, as Sherafat and Murthy (2016) found that private school students demonstrate better Adjustment and academic outcomes than those in government schools.

Contemporary research further strengthens the link between EI and broader psychological outcomes. MacCann et al. (2020) demonstrated through meta-analysis that Emotional Intelligence significantly predicts academic performance. Likewise, Casino-García et al. (2021) found strong associations between EI, self-esteem, and self-concept, indicating that Emotional Intelligence contributes to both academic success and psychological well-being. Additionally, Engelberg and Sjöberg (2004) highlighted the role of social skills and digital behavior in influencing Adjustment, which remains relevant in modern technology-driven contexts.

Recent studies also connects Emotional Intelligence with educational equity and inclusive learning environments. Jones et al. (2020) emphasized that social-emotional learning and positive school climate contribute significantly to equitable academic outcomes. Similarly, Dogaru et al. (2025) argued that fostering Emotional Intelligence enhances inclusive and equitable education, while Madden-Dent (2021) stressed the importance of culturally responsive social-emotional education in diverse learning settings. In language education contexts, Abbas and Iftikhar (2025) highlighted the role of psychosocial environments in student engagement, while Dilawar et al. (2025) and Holbah and Sharma (2021) demonstrated how emotional factors such as anxiety and demotivation affect learning outcomes.

At the policy level, global frameworks reinforce the importance of equity in education. OECD (2018, 2023) and UNESCO (2000, 2015) advocate inclusive and equitable learning systems that address diverse student needs. Earlier educational perspectives (Monroe, 2007) also emphasize holistic development and social responsibility in education.

Despite extensive research, studies often treat Emotional Intelligence, Adjustment, and equity as separate constructs. A significant gap remains in integrating these dimensions into a unified framework, which this study aims to address by examining their interrelated impact on student development.

3. Research Methodology

The Research design for this paper is chosen to be exploratory. An extensive analysis of the existing literature on Emotional Intelligence and Adjustment of students has been done. Research papers have been retrieved from various online sources such as Google scholar, Springer, Science Direct etc. Various related key words such as Emotional Intelligence, Adjustment, Equity and other combinations were used to locate the relevant studies for analysis. Effect of Emotional Intelligence on students Adjustment has been studied in Secondary School level. Keeping in mind the objectives and scope of the study, research papers related to the field of EI and Adjustment have been included. Twenty-five research studies from various double blind peer reviewed journals have been found suitable for this paper.

According to previous research, Emotional Intelligence and social Adjustment are related. However, there are fewer studies on the effect of Emotional Intelligence on Adjustment of an individual with respect to equity in education. Several vital theories, however, support the view that individuals' who are Emotionally Intelligent are well adjusted individuals and they create a conducive environment for all to strive and grow.

3.1 Rationale behind the study

To be Emotionally Intelligent is to be "smarter with feelings." It involves appropriately gathering Emotional Intelligence data and applying it to solve the intrapersonal and interpersonal problems we encounter. The emotional information we see is distorted by cultural biases and the social and cultural expectations of emotion management and expression as a result of systemic injustices (supported by social institutions that formed under racism, sexism, ageism, etc.).

According to Monroe (2007), the terms "Adjustment", "Adaptability" and "Accommodation" are frequently used interchangeably. One must adjust to a society that is evolving. The saying "If you have a brain, you have bias" is widely accepted. Because our brains are designed to be as efficient as possible, we are predisposed to classify and make judgements. Bias quickly turns into prejudice in a polarised, highly stressful social environment. To attain equitable society, it is imperative to demolish the institutional and cultural barriers that separate us by institutionalising discrimination, preserving prejudice, and even making it worse.

Hence, Emotional Intelligence and Adjustment is of utmost importance to be empathetic, self-aware, learn social skills, and learn self-regulation in fostering holistic student development and to bring about an equitable society.

There are several elements that lead to educational inequality namely: socioeconomic conditions; undervaluing the worth of education; under supportive parents owing to ignorance and peer pressure.

4. Key strategies to promote Equity in Education

A well-defined Curriculum that fulfills the demands of our kids and efficient teaching strategies must be taken into consideration. The methods of instruction and curricula must change to meet the students'

evolving requirements. In addition to considering each student's uniqueness, those responsible for developing the curricula and instructing them must also take into consideration their learning preferences and needs. This personalized learning approach lays the foundation for every child to finish school effectively.

4.1 Resource distribution

Resources ought to be distributed fairly so that the kids who are falling behind can receive additional help to catch up. Comparing the amount and calibre of resources given to children from high- and low-income families would not be fair. In order to ensure equity, these kids from lower socioeconomic groups must also have access to the best educators and well-funded schools.

4.2 Changing parents and teachers approach towards education

Due to the numerous difficulties they deal with every day, instructors in public schools with a higher proportion of pupils from low-income families frequently lack motivation and get discouraged. Sometimes these professors have low expectations for their students, and the students don't think their teachers should have high standards either. Both teachers and pupils would have significant absentee rates as a result of this. The disparity in schooling is also influenced by some parents' attitudes towards learning. While some parents believe that education is unnecessary because earlier generations were able to thrive without it, others are demotivated and upset because they too confront many obstacles.

4.3. Demographics

It makes a significant contribution to educational equity. Rural residents would probably be at a disadvantage due to cultural differences and restricted access to resources. It plays an important role in contributing to equity in education. People living in rural areas more than likely would be at a disadvantage because of the cultural differences, limited access to resources.

A concise definition of "equity in education" is difficult to come up with because the concept is so multifaceted and nuanced. However, the goal of developing an educational system that accommodates students of different backgrounds and shapes their educational experience appropriately is the fundamental meaning of the phrase. This means that every student has the chance to receive the assistance and resources they require to meet their academic objectives, regardless of their background, language, colour, economic status, gender, learning capacity, or family history.

Comparably, educational equity is demonstrated in the classroom when kids of various racial and ethnic backgrounds are allowed to observe role models from their community and race. Equity in the classroom can be achieved primarily through inclusive books, narrative problems, and history lectures that feature a diverse range of characters.



Figure1: Equity in Education

The goal of educational equity is to give every student an equal chance to acquire important information and abilities that will allow them to live happy, fulfilled lives and make useful contributions to society. Teachers must redesign the district- and school-level learning systems in order to accomplish this goal and guarantee that the new strategy is implemented top-down. Fairness and inclusivity are the cornerstones of the new system, which also includes resources and intervention programs to ensure that every student has an equal chance to meet their academic objectives.

4.4. Equity vs. Equality in Education

Despite their frequent interchangeability, the terms "equity" and "equality" have certain significant differences. The goal of "equality" is to guarantee equitable access to education is provided for all children throughout their academic careers. Nevertheless, this strategy ignores the fact that, despite these opportunities, certain individuals may require different support systems in order to achieve. Herein lays the role of equity. In order to provide a fair playing field in the educational system, "equity" focuses on using the chances that are given to pupils and providing them with resources and support. This implies that underprivileged kids will receive the assistance they require to catch up to their more advantaged peers.

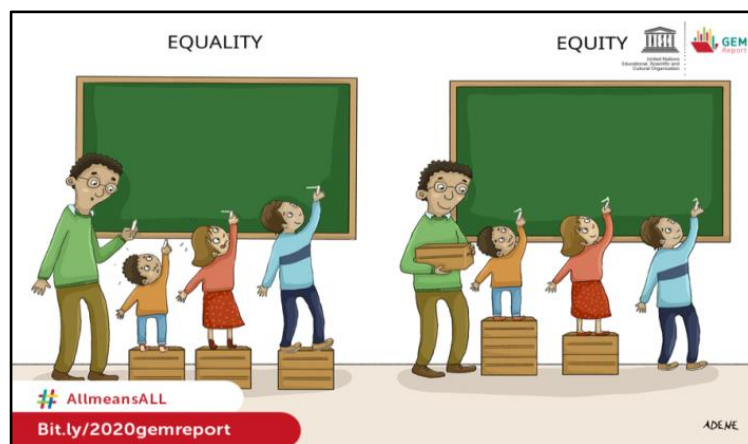


Figure 2: Equality vs Equity

4.5. Importance of Educational Equity

There are several justifications for the significance of educational equity, such as:

- Providing underprivileged and disadvantaged children with opportunities to succeed by helping them overcome barriers to learning.
- Encouraging every learner to acquire knowledge in ways that best suit their individual learning styles and needs.
- Strengthening collaboration between families and teachers to create a more supportive and stimulating learning environment at home.
- Supporting students in achieving success both within the classroom and in real-life contexts beyond school.
- Recognizing and learning from individuals with similar gender, racial, or ethnic backgrounds to foster inclusion and representation in learning.
- Enhancing and expanding educational resources to better support students' academic growth.
- Ensuring equal opportunities for all learners by promoting fairness in access and achievement.
- Preparing students to become productive, self-reliant members of society while reducing long-term dependence on government support.

5. Encouraging incorporation of Equity in Education in schools

Even while it's true that change takes time, teachers can help make a big difference in the education system by taking these small steps in the right direction.

5.1 Dealing with systemic problems

Teachers can develop workable strategies to avoid the negative effects that impact poverty, ethnicity, gender, and other categories can have on a student's education by raising their awareness of these concerns. Even while they might not be able to resolve these problems on their own, by learning more about them, they can identify how they impact students' ability to learn and make the necessary corrections. Better possibilities for kids can be created in the classroom by teachers who have a thorough understanding of how systems work and affect their students.

5.2 Considering the function of leadership and administration

It is possible that these groups are either ignorant of the ways in which systemic problems might impact students or that they are themselves a part of the problems. Instructors can be useful in bringing these issues to the attention of the leadership and in ensuring that everyone is in agreement on how to handle them. Encouraging greater fairness in classrooms, schools, and communities is largely dependent on teachers who understand when and how to collaborate with administrators.

5.3 Breaking down hurdles in the classroom

Deficits in learning and development frequently surface early in a child's schooling; therefore, skilled teachers spot those roadblocks before they become obstacles, giving more opportunities for a student to succeed. This may entail informing parents about the resources for support available to their children or guiding them through the process of locating and using those options.

5.4 Talking about technology's role

Although many students lack access to a computer that can help them study at home or a dependable internet connection, technology is an essential part of their educational programme. Teachers can give their children access to dependable technology through the school and open up a support system. By ensuring that all kids have access to technology, using it in educational settings where all kids may benefit from it, and instructing parents on how to utilize technology at home, and other ways, teachers may contribute to the creation of equality around technology.

5.5 Frequent reevaluation of student performance

Tracking student performance is a crucial step in the process since it indicates areas where a teacher's equitable approach is working and those that require work. Instructors that are committed to equity monitor their students' progress on a frequent basis and discuss ways to improve equity so that all of their students can succeed.

In order to guarantee that every child achieves academic success, educational equality is a complex and significant subject. Even in the absence of a definitive answer or solution, educators may nevertheless make an effort to recognize underprivileged students and promote fairness on a daily basis in their classrooms.

5.6 Challenges to Creating an Equitable Environment for Students

For underprivileged pupils, learning is made possible by having access to an equitable education. Abraham Maslow was a well-known thinker who created the hierarchy of needs in the



Figure 3: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943)

form of a pyramid. He proposed the idea that the human mind cannot ascend the pyramid until the layers below it is satisfied. For instance, it is highly improbable that a dyslexic student who is both hungry and

anxious about the rising temperatures will be able to understand the significance of the quadratic equation. One of the main causes of the accomplishment gap is this lack of information availability.

Teachers frequently encounter obstacles to equity in the classroom. Recognizing these obstacles' locations and, more crucially, the approaches that may be taken to overcome them is the best method to go over them.

As an educator, one will be better able to identify and overcome barriers to equity if one has a thorough understanding of them. The following equity vulnerabilities could exist for certain students:

- Living in poverty in one's home or community;
- Being homeless or living in a shelter;
- Witnessing abuse and neglect of children;
- Not having access to enough food or medical care;
- Having learning or intellectual disabilities;
- Suffering from visual or hearing loss

Even though they may not be able to explicitly address every one of these challenges, educators can nonetheless take steps to address issues of equity when they emerge.

5.7 Initiatives by ARISE (Action for reducing inequalities in Education), OECD (organization for economic cooperation and development) and Government of India towards equity

Approximately 17% of the world's population, or 258 million children, adolescents, and youth are predicted to not be in school as listed in the UNESCO GEM Report 2020, despite the fact that education is a chance that has the power to change lives. Furthermore, the data indicated that it will take decades to close the wealth difference between the poorest and richest children at the current rate. Furthermore, the PISA 2018 data indicates that inadequate social diversity in schools may contribute to impoverished children's enrollment in schools with disproportionately large numbers of low achievers, which might negatively affect their performance. However, the data of PISA 2022 shows dramatic fall in performance it suggests a negative shock affecting many countries at the same time COVID-19 would appear to be an obvious factor.

As part of a larger strategic framework that the partnership shares, the ARISE Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education initiative works to promote equity in education by ensuring that socioeconomic status does not stand in the way of achieving educational potential and mitigating the effects of social deprivation.

The goal of the international body OECD is to create better policies that lead to better lives. To develop policies that promotes wealth, equality, opportunity, and everyone's well-being. They solve a variety of social, economic, and environmental problems and create evidence-based worldwide standards in collaboration with governments, policymakers, and citizens. They offer a special forum and knowledge hub for data and analysis, experience sharing, best-practice sharing, and guidance on public policies and international standard-setting.

Today, the international community is committed to the right to education, which was first established in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and is now mandated in national legislation (UNESCO, 2000). Equity in education is also a specific target of the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations in 2015 (UNESCO, 2015).

"Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality," according to the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. This has ramifications for the growth of inclusive communities and society at large. The Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) umbrella term, which includes gender identities, socio-cultural and socio-economic identities, geographical identities, and disabilities, is where the policy addresses concern and recommendations about including underrepresented student groups, including children with disabilities.

Ministry of Education's integrated Samagra Shiksha plan, which is centrally financed, offers pre-primary through senior secondary schooling. The programme encourages all States and UTs to adopt the NEP's recommendations and seeks in order to provide everyone access to education in schools. One of the scheme's main goals is to ensure equity and diversity at all educational levels.

5.8 Educational implication

The aim of education is facilitating students the knowledge and talents they need to succeed as contributing members of society. But for some students, the road to achieving their goals could provide more significant challenges than for others. For instance, some children may struggle to complete homework in a school context due to socioeconomic disadvantages or learning difficulties. Teachers may assist in lowering these obstacles and fostering an atmosphere where everyone can perform to the best of their abilities by advocating for equality in education.

- Raising equity aids in the formation of students into tomorrow's leaders. One research, for instance, found that students' leadership skills improved more when they attended more varied learning environments.
- Better learning outcomes and exam performance are associated with more equity. For example, studies have shown that performance differences in competitive exams, reduced by as much as a quarter in one study, as there was drop in racial segregation in schools.
- According to some research, students who engage in more inclusive learning environments and interact with a varied peer group are less likely to have skewed or prejudiced opinions later in life, which promotes tolerance and fairness in society.
- Students are more likely to be involved in the learning process when they feel recognised, supported, and included. Increased degrees of student involvement have been connected to improved academic performance, according to research.
- In terms of the future, equitable education enables every student to achieve their objectives and potential. Long term, this will help individuals discover their place in society, establish diverse workplaces where they can prosper regardless of where they came from, and open doors to equitable career prospects.

Conclusion

This study reaffirms that education is not merely a cognitive process but a holistic system that shapes students' emotional, social, and psychological development. The findings clearly establish a strong relationship between emotional intelligence and student adjustment, demonstrating that emotionally intelligent students are better equipped to manage academic pressures, maintain interpersonal relationships, and achieve overall well-being. In line with the study objectives, emotional intelligence emerges as a critical factor in enhancing students' social, emotional, and academic functioning.

Furthermore, the study highlights the significant role of educational equity in supporting student adjustment by ensuring that diverse learners receive the necessary resources and opportunities tailored to their individual needs. Equitable learning environments, supported by inclusive curricula, fair resource distribution, and positive psychosocial conditions, enable students to adapt effectively and succeed regardless of their background. Emotionally intelligent individuals also contribute to the creation of inclusive and supportive learning spaces, thereby strengthening equity within educational systems.

The review of existing research and policy frameworks, including OECD and UNESCO initiatives, further emphasizes that promoting emotional intelligence alongside equitable practices is essential for addressing systemic inequalities and fostering holistic development. These interconnected dimensions collectively contribute to improved academic outcomes, psychological resilience, and social responsibility among learners.

Thus, the study underscores that integrating emotional intelligence with equitable educational practices is fundamental to nurturing well-adjusted, self-aware, and adaptable individuals. Such integration not only enhances student development but also supports the creation of inclusive, just, and sustainable educational systems for the future.

Acknowledgment

The authors sincerely express their gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful and constructive feedback, which significantly contributed to improving the quality and clarity of this paper.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article. This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or non-profit sectors. All ethical standards in conducting educational research were duly followed.

AI Declaration

The authors declare that this manuscript involves no plagiarism or fabrication of data, and all ethical guidelines for educational research have been strictly adhered to during the conduct of the study. AI tools, if used, were

solely for language refinement, grammatical clarity and formatting assistance. No AI tool was used for generating the core ideas, analysis, interpretations, or findings of the research.

About the Author

Dr. Sahanaaz khatun is particularly interested in research related to educational psychology. She has successfully completed her Ph.D. from Aliah University, Kolkata. Her passion lies in exploring meaningful research in education, especially how people learn and grow. She is deeply interested in studying new approaches to teaching and improving learning experiences. ORCID ID- 0009-0006-6526-5087

Dr. Jakir Hussain Laskar is presently serving as a professor and Head of Department of Education, Aliah University, Kolkata His educational qualifications are B.Ed, MA(History), MA(Education), M.Ed. M.Phil in Education and Ph.D in Education from Ravenshaw University, Odisha. He has long experience in research and has authored many books and papers. ORCID ID- 0009-0008-9221-2022

References

- Abdullah, M. C., Elias, H., Mahyuddin, R., & Uli, J. (2009). The relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment amongst first year students in a Malaysian public university. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 4(9), 95–105.
- Adeyemo, D. A. (2005). The buffering effect of emotional intelligence on the adjustment of secondary school students in transition. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 3(6), 79–90.
- Alam, Dr. Md. M. (2018) study of adjustment among senior secondary school students, *ijcrt* | volume 6, issue 1 january 2018 | Issn: 2320-2882
- Engelberg, E., & Sjöberg, L. (2004). Internet use, social skills, and adjustment. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior*, 7(1).
- Kumari, D. N., & Kamala, S. M. (2022). A study on the problems of adjustment among secondary school students. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 12(5), 26–30. www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd58599.pdf
- Monroe, M. C. (2007). A priority for ESD research: Influencing adult citizens. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development*, 1(1), 107–113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097340820700100118>
- OECD. (2018). *Equity in education: Breaking down barriers to social mobility*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264073234-en>
- OECD. (2023). *PISA 2022 results (Volume I): The state of learning and equity in education*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en>
- Sherafat, R., & Murthy, C. (2016). A study of study habits and academic achievement among secondary and senior secondary school students of Mysore City. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.25215/0302.055>

UNESCO. (2000). *World education report 2000: The right to education; towards education for all throughout life*. UNESCO Publishing.

UNESCO. (2015). *Incheon declaration: Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all*.

Disclaimer / Publisher's Note: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author(s) alone and do not reflect those of the *S3R Academia* or its editor(s). The journal and its editor(s) bear no responsibility for any loss, harm, or consequences arising from the use of the information, ideas, or methods presented.