



ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 1, Issue. 1 (2026), pp. 01–09

Received: 19-04-2026 | Accepted: 26-04-2026 | Published: 20-05-2026

Exploring Fixed mindset, Emotional intelligence and Impostor phenomenon among university students: A Correlational Study

Riya Bajaj*, Simplejit Kaur Dhanoa**

**Masters student, Department of Psychology, Amity University Punjab, Mohali, India*

***Professor & Director, Department of Psychology, Amity University Punjab, Mohali, India*

Corresponding Author Email: skdhanoa@pb.amity.edu

ABSTRACT

A number of academic, personal and psychological difficulties that students experience while at college may greatly affect their self-perception and evaluation of their accomplishments. This study examined the relationship between fixed mindset, emotional intelligence, and impostor phenomenon experienced by university students. The research sample comprised 122 individuals aged 18 to 25 years. Data were collected using the Multidimensional Mindset Scale (MUMIS; Ortiz Alvarado et al., 2024), the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law, 2002), and the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (Clance, 1985). Descriptive statistics, Pearson product–moment correlation, and independent samples t-test were used for data analysis. The findings indicated that there is a positive significant relationship between fixed mindset and impostor phenomenon and negative significant relationship between fixed mindset and emotional intelligence. At the same time, emotional intelligence does not correlate with the impostor experience statistically significantly. Moreover, significant differences between male and female groups were obtained only in case of fixed mindset. Males have reported higher scores in this area than females. Thus, even though emotional competencies may assist in students' adaptation, it seems that cognitions regarding one's abilities are the core factor associated with the impostor experience.

Keywords: *Fixed mindset, Emotional intelligence, Impostor phenomenon, University students, Self-perception*

1. INTRODUCTION

Moving to university is an important stage of development that involves greater academic pressure, changes in social roles, and enhanced self-assessment. At this stage, besides academic duties, learners must deal with emotional and psychological problems arising from adjusting to their new surroundings. This process significantly affects their self-perception, sense of skills and competencies, and overall self-concept.

One of the central psychological theories that impact academic behavior is the notion of the mindset. According to Dweck (2006), people have different mindsets regarding intelligence and skills. People who believe that abilities and intelligence remain stable and are not subject to change have a fixed mindset. Such people are more likely to avoid challenges and interpret failure as evidence of limited ability (Dweck, 2006). Research indicates that people with a fixed mindset show poor academic perseverance and low levels of motivation when faced with academic challenges (Burnette et al., 2013). More recently, Ortiz Alvarado et al. (2024) found that negative attitudes toward academic skills impede positive learning behaviors and hinder academic progress, especially in challenging learning environments.

Besides cognitive beliefs, emotional aspects of students' adaptation to educational settings should not be neglected. Emotional intelligence is explained as the ability which enables to understand emotions in oneself and others, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions for effective personal functioning (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Studies show that emotionally intelligent people experience better psychological well-being, stress management, and interpersonal relations compared to less emotionally intelligent people (Schutte et al., 2007). As (Vilca-Pareja et al., 2022) state, emotionally intelligent individuals tend to possess more resilient coping behaviors, greater self-esteem, and higher life satisfaction.

Another psychological construct relevant to the academic environment that deserves consideration is the Impostor Phenomenon. As proposed by Clance (1985), it is characterized by persistent self-doubt, attribution of successes to external circumstances irrespective of having sufficient competency evidence (Clance, 1985). Bravata et al. (2020) report that the Impostor Phenomenon impacts university students quite often because of academic pressure and constant social comparison with peers. Moreover, Pákozky et al. (2023) discovered that high levels of impostor phenomenon are correlated with low self-efficacy, perfectionism, and low life satisfaction.

Despite numerous studies dedicated to each of these constructs separately, there is very little information on how they function and interrelate when applied to one particular population. Cognitive beliefs regarding ability can affect how students respond to challenges faced, while emotional intelligence can help them in managing emotional reactions. However, it is unclear whether emotionally intelligent people will be less affected by fixed mindset-related challenges, and whether the former has an independent impact on the latter.

While there has been an increase in the number of studies regarding these constructs, there is no study that integrates these factors to investigate the simultaneous impact of fixed mindsets, emotional intelligence, and impostor phenomenon on university students' self-concept and adaptation within their academic environment. Such a gap in the literature highlights the need for exploring the role of cognitive beliefs and emotional skills simultaneously in influencing students' self-perception and adaptation in college.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between Fixed mindset, Emotional intelligence and Impostor phenomenon among university students.
2. To Compare Fixed mindset among male and female of university students.
3. To Compare Emotional intelligence among male and female of university students.
4. To Compare Impostor phenomenon among male and female of university students.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is a significant relationship between Fixed mindset, Emotional intelligence and Impostor phenomenon among university students.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): There will be a significant difference in Fixed mindset between male and female among university students.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): There will be a significant difference in Emotional intelligence between male and female among university students

Hypothesis 4 (H4): There will be a significant difference in Impostor phenomena between male and female among university students

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

A sample of 122 university students (N =122) between the ages of 18 -25 years, including both undergraduate and postgraduate students from private universities in tri-city (Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula) was used with a majority of female participants. Convenience sampling was used. To be eligible, participants were aged 18 -25 years, enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate courses in tri-city universities, able to read and write in English and willing to give informed consent. Those not currently enrolled in a course or not from Tri-city universities, those older than 25 years or younger than 28 years and those who provided invalid responses(i.e, more than 20% data missing or signs of careless responding) were excluded. The Research was approved by the institutional ethics committee, and a participants provided informed consent with confidentiality assured.

2.2 Instruments

Multidimensional mindset scale (MUMIS; Ortiz Alvarado et al., 2024) is a self-report instrument with 25 items that aims to measure fixed and growth mindset as independent variables. It contains four levels: expectations about intelligence, practice and effort, reaction to a challenge, beliefs about multiple intelligences. This scale is based on a Likert-type response scale and is not reverse coded. It shows sufficient consistency between different dimensions of the internal consistency and satisfactory construct validity. The measure will gauge how people believe in the malleability of the intelligence and how they are oriented towards learning, effort, and challenges.

The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong and Law, 2002) is a 16-item self-report scale which is founded on the ability model of emotional intelligence. It has four dimensions namely self-emotional appraisal, emotion appraisal of others, emotion regulation and emotion utilization, each having four items. The responses are taken on a 7 point Likert scale that varies with strongly disagree to strongly agree. In prior studies, the scale has demonstrated good internal consistency with subscale reliabilities average of above .70 and total reliability of the scale being between .80 and .90. It determines how well one can perceive, understand, regulate and utilize emotions.

The Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985) is a self-report professional measuring 20 items that quantify a feel of impostor, identified by continuous self-doubts and attributing success to the external elements (lucky situations). It is made up of three conceptual dimension's fake, discounting positive feedback, and luck. The responses will be rated on a 5 points Likert scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scale has shown to be very internally consistent with high reliability in the overall score and moderate reliability in its subscales (French et al., 2008). It gauges the degree to which people feel intellectually defrauded in spite of objective accomplishments.

2.3 Procedure

The subjects were recruited through academic circles and answered the survey questions online. Consent was sought, and ethical issues, such as confidentiality and voluntariness, were observed. In this study, the association between fixed mindset, emotional intelligence, and Impostor Phenomenon was analyzed using a quantitative correlation research design. Additionally, Gender differences in terms of these three constructs have also been considered through a comparison study.

2.4 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was conducted with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics. All the study variables have been calculated using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. Missing values screened and normality screened data were then analyzed. Pearson, product-moment correlation was used to test relationship between the variables and independent sample t-tests were carried out to determine gender differences. Cohen d was used to report its effect sizes. The tests were all two tailed with a level of significance $\alpha = .05$.

3. RESULTS

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 122)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	37	30.3
	Female	85	69.7
Age group	18-20	32	26.2
	21-23	75	61.5
	24-25	15	12.3
Academic program	Undergraduate	47	38.5
	Postgraduate	75	61.5

Institution type	Private	101	82.8
	Government	21	17.2

As shown in Table 1 the sample consisted mainly of females (69.7%) whose ages fell within the range of 21-23 years. Postgraduate students and private institution students formed the majority of the respondents.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Fixed Mindset	122	18	81	43.32	13.01	0.38	-0.05
Emotional Intelligence	122	45	112	84.81	14.30	-0.48	0.14
SEA	122	5	28	21.98	4.41	-0.82	1.05
OEA	122	8	28	21.66	4.52	-0.93	0.64
UOE	122	11	28	21.66	4.23	-0.25	-0.60
ROE	122	4	28	19.51	4.96	-0.51	0.27
Impostor Phenomena	122	36	100	67.88	14.70	0.12	-0.48

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; SEA = Self-Emotion Appraisal; OEA = Others' Emotion Appraisal; UOE = Use of Emotion; ROE = Regulation of Emotion.

As shown in Table 2 findings indicated moderate levels of fixed mindset, relatively high emotional intelligence, and notable levels of impostor phenomenon among participants

Table 3

Distribution of Participants Across Levels

Variable	Level	n	%
Fixed Mindset	Low (14–37)	41	33.6
	Moderate (38–60)	71	58.2
	High (61–84)	10	8.2
Emotional Intelligence	Low (16–48)	2	1.6
	Moderate (49–80)	40	32.8
	High (81–112)	80	65.6
Impostor Phenomenon	Few (≤ 40)	3	2.5
	Moderate (41–60)	34	27.9
	Frequent (61–80)	62	50.8
	Intense (> 80)	23	18.9

Note. Impostor Phenomenon levels follow Clance (1985) scoring guidelines

As shown in Table 3 a majority of students reported moderate fixed mindset and high emotional intelligence, while a substantial proportion experienced frequent impostor feeling.

Table 4

Correlation Matrix among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Fixed Mindset	—	-.228*	.341**
2. Emotional Intelligence	-.228*	—	.112
3. Impostor Phenomenon	.341**	.112	—

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

As shown in Table 4 Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between fixed mindset and emotional intelligence, and a significant positive relationship between fixed mindset and impostor phenomenon. Emotional intelligence was not significantly related to impostor phenomenon.

Table 5

Gender Differences in Study Variables

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	df	p	d	Result
Fixed Mindset	Male	37	47.16	13.89					
	Female	85	41.65	12.32	2.186	120	.031	0.431	Significant
Emotional Intelligence	Male	37	86.84	16.28					
	Female	85	83.93	13.36	1.033	120	.304	0.203	Not Significant
Impostor Phenomenon	Male	37	71.11	16.46					
	Female	85	66.47	13.73	1.612	120	.110	0.318	Not Significant

As shown in Table 5 Independent samples t-test indicated a significant gender difference in fixed mindset, with males scoring higher. No significant differences were found for emotional intelligence and impostor phenomenon

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this research revealed how much cognitive beliefs influenced the feelings of students and their self-perceptions. Fixed mindset and impostor phenomenon also had a strong relationship, whereby the more a learner believed that his or her abilities were fixed, the more the student was predisposed to doubt himself or herself and develop inferiority complex especially in challenging learning situations. Failings tended to be seen as affirmation of low competence and this helped deepen the impostor beliefs even when students did not fail. This is consistent with the available evidence that entity beliefs have a positive relationship with impostor phenomenon based on maladaptive interpretations of success and failure (Kumar and Jagacinski, 2006; Ibrahim et al., 2023). An additional connection between the fixed mindset and impostor phenomenon is based on previous studies, which show that a fixed mindset correlates with impostor phenomenon via fear of failure and avoidance-focused achievement strategies (Noskeau et al., 2021).

Fixed mindset and emotional intelligence also showed negative correlation, indicating that well-developed fixed mindset beliefs about intelligence can lower effectiveness of people at controlling their emotions. Students that held a fixed mindset were more likely to react to stress, frustration and helplessness, instead of coping in an adaptive manner, negatively affecting their psychological adaptation. This is evidenced by meta-analytic results that show that implicit theories of intelligence are highly related to self-regulation, emotional reactions and coping behaviours during achievement situations (Burnette et al., 2013).

Interestingly, emotional intelligence was not significantly linked with impostor phenomenon. This implies that emotional intelligence may assist people in coping with stress, but impostor feelings lie deeper in cognitive beliefs on competence and self-worth than it is in emotional regulation. The available literature confirms this interpretation, stating that impostor phenomenon has a stronger relationship with cognitive (perfectionism, self-esteem, and fear of failure) than emotional intelligence variables (Bravata et al., 2020).

Practically speaking, the results suggest that intervention should target the beliefs that students hold regarding intelligence and encourage more adaptive thinking styles. Promoting a growth-focused style within academic settings can contribute to decreasing self-doubt and creating more positive self-images. Moreover, stress management and an improvement of well-being can be improved with the help of emotional skills training provided in educational institutions. Future studies need to be conducted in terms of longitudinal designs to identify these relations and should incorporate more psychological variables to have a more complete picture of what student's experience.

5. CONCLUSION

This research paper offers an additional contribution to the body of knowledge on the psychological components of the experiences of university students. Through the study of fixed mindset, emotional intelligence, and impostor phenomenon, the study sheds light on the interactions of psychological mechanisms in defining student perceptions.

The research results indicate that fixed mindset is a crucial psychological component that affects both emotional intelligence and impostor phenomenon. When students possess rigid ideas regarding themselves, they are more prone to experiencing self-doubt and viewing challenges from a threatening

perspective. Thus, while emotional intelligence has been related to improved emotional functioning, it does not seem to predict impostor phenomenon.

Such findings can be of high importance for practical interventions in the field of education and psychology. Interventions focused on the development of a student's belief system, promotion of growth mindsets, and cultivation of psychological resilience will contribute to the establishment of a more accurate perception of one's capabilities. Also, creating a supportive academic environment that does not involve over-comparison and provides proper feedback is expected to positively affect students' self-perception.

All things considered, there is much in common between emotional intelligence and fixed mindset when it comes to predicting impostor phenomenon.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

FUNDING

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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