



Research Paper

Emotional intelligence and interpersonal relationships

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ABSTRACT:

In recent years, emotional intelligence has increasingly been in the focus of scholarly attention. This is hardly surprising given its considerable relevance in the social functioning of the individual. The present article also examines emotional intelligence, however, through the prism of its influence on interpersonal relationships. The findings from the empirical study confirmed the hypothesis that emotional intelligence constitutes a significant determinant of variability in social interactions, thereby fostering more balanced and effective communication.

KEYWORDS: *personality, emotional intelligence, communication, interpersonal relationships, effective communication*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in the quality of interpersonal relationships across diverse contexts, whether personal, social, educational, or professional. It shapes and influences the dynamics of the communication in a distinctive way (Goleman, 2011). Interpersonal relationships represent a fundamental aspect of the development of human personality, the process of social adaptation, and the attainment of emotional fulfillment. They are established and sustained through a complex and multidimensional communicative process that transcends the simple exchange of information. Within the scientific literature, communication is conceptualized as a dynamic interaction of meanings, emotions, perceptions, and values, in which participants simultaneously shape and perceive social reality (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967).

From this perspective, interpersonal communication fulfills multiple functions—establishing social identity, regulating emotions, defining social roles, and sustaining group cohesion (Goffman, 1959). It constitutes three interrelated components—cognitive, emotional, and behavioral—each of which occupies an essential role in the effectiveness of social interaction.

The emotional dimension reflects the individual's deep inner involvement in the communication process and encompasses key psychological mechanisms such as empathy, affective sensitivity, emotional self-awareness, and emotional regulation. The capacity to recognize and label one's own feelings, as well as to empathize with the emotions of others, forms the basis of authentic connection and psychological security (Decety & Jackson, 2004). Empathy—in both its cognitive and affective dimensions—promotes the development of reciprocity and psychological safety within interpersonal relationships. Emotional regulation also plays a key role in this dimension, as it represents the process through which individuals modify the intensity, duration, and expression of their emotional states in a given context (Gross, 2002; Thompson, 1994). Effective regulation supports the management of impulsive reactions, enhances social adaptability, and facilitates the maintenance of harmonious and functional relationships. In the context of interpersonal communication, emotional regulation serves not only as a mechanism of self-control but also as a means of emotional management—the use of an appropriate affective tone that fosters collaboration, empathy, and trust. Conversely, a lack of emotional self-awareness or heightened emotional instability often results in misunderstandings, conflict, and psychological strain, underscoring the importance of this dimension for sustaining healthy interpersonal relationships (Saari, 1999; Lopes et al., 2005).

The behavioral dimension manifests itself through specific communicative actions such as listening, assertiveness, empathic expression, and behavioral flexibility. It also includes the ability to adapt speech and behavior to one's interlocutor, as well as the use of appropriate communicative strategies such as politeness, active listening, and the management of social dynamics (Argyle, 1983).

Consequently, the emotional dimension of interpersonal communication is not limited solely to empathic experience and the regulation of emotions; rather, it encompasses a complex conglomerate of internal psychological processes. These involve the awareness and labeling of one's own affects, the accurate interpretation of others' emotional expressions, and the flexible emotional adaptation to the social context. In this sense, emotional interaction functions as an "affective bridge" between individuals, through which experiences of connectedness, trust, and mutual understanding are constructed—critical factors for the maintenance of enduring and sustainable interpersonal relationships (Decety & Jackson, 2004; Gross, 2002; Lopes et al., 2005).

The dynamic interplay between empathy, affect regulation, and social sensitivity shapes the emotional climate of communication—a parameter that determines not only the quality of social relationships but also their functionality, stability, and effectiveness. From this perspective, the development of emotional competence within interpersonal communication represents not merely an individual resource but a social imperative, particularly in environments that demand a high degree of cooperation, emotional attunement, and relational flexibility.

According to Teodorov (2020), in the field of social work the ability to recognize, interpret, and regulate emotions is crucial for building trust, ensuring effective communication, and providing emotional support when working with vulnerable groups. The author emphasizes empathy, emotional self-regulation, and social awareness as core components of professional competence. This view corresponds with widely accepted models of emotional intelligence, which underscore its influence on the quality of interpersonal relationships and professional effectiveness.

Within typologies of interpersonal relationships, different social contexts call for different communicative approaches. Professional relationships are characterized by clarity, efficiency, and hierarchy, with emotional intelligence proving essential for conflict management and the development of trust (Goleman, 2010). Friendships are marked by spontaneity and reciprocity, whereas romantic relationships involve depth of self-disclosure, emotional closeness, and the mutual regulation of stress (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Family relationships, in turn, are often shaped by long-standing interactional patterns in which individual, cultural, and generational factors intersect.

Effective communication is not merely an instrument but a psychological process that cannot be achieved without appropriate emotional presence, empathy, and cognitive flexibility. It is a dynamic system in which linguistic and non-linguistic, personal and social, rational and emotional factors are interconnected to create social bonds that form the foundation of individual well-being and social order.

Interpersonal relationships constitute an indispensable aspect of social life, influencing psychological health, identity, and social adaptation. In social psychology, relationships are conceptualized as dynamic connections between two or more individuals that may vary in duration, intimacy, closeness, intensity, and context (Ye & Ye, 2020). At their core lies the principle of mutual exchange, denoting a bidirectional flow of emotions, assistance, resources, and social control, which maintains stability and balance within relationships (Molm et al., 2007).

The quality and durability of interpersonal relationships depend on multiple factors. Among these are trust, honesty, open communication, and emotional intelligence (Berscheid, 1999). External determinants such as social norms, cultural values, legal regulations, and mutual expectations also exert influence, structurally defining individual behavior. Effective communication, conflict resolution, and the capacity to sustain empathy are central to the process of building meaningful relationships—whether romantic, familial, friendly, or professional (Acker & Davis, 1992).

Emotional intelligence emerges as a particularly important factor in successful interaction across all of these forms of interpersonal communication. Each of the five core components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—plays a crucial role in the individual's interaction with the social world and in the construction of enduring relationships (Goleman, 2010). According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), individuals with high emotional intelligence possess a strong capacity to understand and manage both their own emotions and those of others, to build stronger relationships, and to cope more effectively with stress management and adaptation to social contexts.

II. METHOD

Objective

The primary objective of the present study is to examine and analyze the relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and its patterns of expression in interpersonal communication, through the categories of *Dominance* and *Affiliation*.

Primary Hypothesis

It is assumed that the level of emotional intelligence significantly influences interpersonal communication.

Secondary Hypothesis 1

Higher emotional intelligence is associated with greater affiliation and with balanced, adaptive behavior in social interactions, characterized by moderate dominance.

Secondary Hypothesis 2

Lower levels of emotional intelligence are associated with heightened dominance as well as with reduced affiliation, which does not necessarily stem from emotional awareness and self-regulation.

Methodological Tools

The following psychological tests are employed as the primary research instruments:

Emotional Intelligence Test by Christophe André

The Emotional Intelligence Test developed by French psychiatrist Christophe André (2014) is designed to assess the core components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, social skills, and attitudes toward oneself, others, and life as a whole. The instrument consists of 42 statements to which participants indicate their degree of agreement on a four-point scale ranging from “*completely true*” to “*not at all true*.” Each response is scored, and the total score determines the individual’s overall level of emotional intelligence.

The interpretation scale is as follows:

- 121–168 points – high emotional intelligence coefficient
- 81–120 points – average coefficient
- 42–80 points – low coefficient

In addition to providing a general assessment of emotional intelligence, the test allows for the analysis of specific aspects such as attitudes toward oneself (self-awareness and self-development), toward others (communicative skills and empathy), and toward life (emotional balance and harmony). The test is grounded in established concepts from the theory of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills). The author has applied this instrument extensively in his therapeutic and teaching practice (André, 2012), which attests to its strong psychometric properties.

Interpersonal Relations Test by Timothy Leary

Timothy Leary’s methodology represents a classic and well-established instrument for diagnosing interpersonal behavior, grounded in interpersonal theory. The Interpersonal Check List (ICL), based on Leary’s interpersonal model (The Interpersonal Circumplex Model), has been empirically validated in numerous studies, including Paddock and Nowicki (1986), who reported internal consistency with a Cronbach’s α of 0.83. Thus, demonstrating good reliability according to accepted psychometric standards.

The test classifies social behaviors into eight primary styles: dominant-leadership, independent-dominant, straightforward-aggressive, distrustful-skeptical, submissive-shy, dependent-compliant, cooperative-conventional, and responsible-generous. Each style reflects a characteristic pattern of behavior in relationships with others—ranging from dominant to submissive, and from hostile to cooperative.

In the present study, the results from the eight scales were further summarized into two overarching vectors: Dominance (D) and Affiliation (G). These dimensions, derived through factor analysis, are widely used in the psychometric interpretation of the model. The Dominance (D) vector represents the continuum between dominance and submission, while the Affiliation (G) vector reflects the continuum between hostility and empathy. This two-dimensional structure enables a more precise positioning of each individual’s interpersonal style within the dynamics of social interaction and defines their typical patterns of interpersonal behavior. The instrument consists of a questionnaire with 64 statements, to which participants indicate their level of agreement.

Sample

The sample in the present study consisted of 118 adult participants aged between 18 and 65 years, with a mean age of 40.2 years. To ensure socio-demographic balance, the sample was evenly distributed by gender—male (59) and female (59)—and by educational level, encompassing individuals across all levels of education. Participants were also drawn from various types of settlements, representing all administrative regions of the country.

The main goal in selecting the sample was to secure diversity in key demographic characteristics, thereby enabling a more in-depth analysis of the relationships between emotional intelligence, interpersonal behavior, and the social context. Participants were invited to take part in the study through an online announcement, which was distributed via social networks, personal contacts, and professional communities.

Procedure

The procedure for conducting the present empirical study went through several consecutive stages: planning and preparation, recruitment of participants, administration of the instruments, data processing, and interpretation of the results. Each of these stages was carefully structured to ensure the validity, reliability, and ethical integrity of the research process.

All participants were informed in advance about the aim of the study, the nature of the questionnaires, the approximate duration (15–20 minutes), and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. No participant received financial compensation, and participation was entirely anonymous. Data were stored on a secure electronic device.

Data Processing

The collected data were processed using Microsoft Excel. Several analytical procedures were applied. Following the completion of the questionnaires, the initial step involved a careful screening for missing responses, incomplete data, or apparent inconsistencies. All valid results were manually entered into Excel spreadsheets, which allowed for precise individual processing of each measurement.

Specifically, the following were calculated:

- The total emotional intelligence score, based on the key provided by Christophe André's scale;
- The scores for each of the eight scales, followed by the calculation of the "Dominance" and "Affiliation" vectors from Timothy Leary's methodology, using pre-defined formulas (Leary, 1957).

Subsequently, descriptive statistics were performed, including the calculation of means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values, and medians for each of the studied variables.

In addition, standard statistical methods were applied, including:

- Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to examine the significance of differences in the Dominance (D) and Affiliation (G) vectors across groups with low, medium, and high levels of emotional intelligence.

Furthermore, a qualitative analysis was conducted, whereby the results were interpreted as socio-psychological aspects of behavior, considering the existing scientific literature. This combined approach enabled a multilayered understanding of the relationship between individual resources and interpersonal dynamics, providing a basis for the formulation of practical conclusions.

Limitations of the Study

The present study is subject to certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

First, the sample of 118 participants, although sufficient for conducting statistical analyses, cannot be considered representative of the Bulgarian population given its demographic and cultural diversity. To ensure optimal accuracy, a much broader range of participants is required.

Second, the application of self-report methodologies, such as Christophe André's Emotional Intelligence Scale and Timothy Leary's model of interpersonal behavior, carries the risk of subjective bias. These instruments assume that participants respond sincerely and realistically, which cannot always be guaranteed. Individuals are often inclined to provide socially desirable responses or to identify with positive traits, even when such traits may not accurately reflect their personality (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). This raises questions about the internal validity and reliability of certain findings.

Considering these limitations, future research should employ longitudinal designs, multi-method approaches to data collection (e.g., self-reflection, observation, interviews), and larger, more diverse samples. Such strategies would allow for a deeper and more accurate understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence and interpersonal behavior.

Results and Analysis

The following section presents the results of the analysis of differences in interpersonal relationships with respect to the level of emotional intelligence. Table 1 illustrates the relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and the Dominance (D) vector, which measures the degree of authoritative behavior in interpersonal relations.

Table 1. Comparison of emotional intelligence coefficient with Dominance (D) vector.

Emotional Intelligence Coefficient	Dominance (D) Vector				
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimal value	Maximal value	Median
Low	-2,96	6,33	-10,9	18,3	0
Medium	-1,47	6,66	-11,6	13,5	-1,5

High	0	6,92	-12,2	13,8	0
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The empirical data indicate that for individuals with high emotional intelligence the mean dominance value equals zero (0), suggesting balanced behavior. For those with medium emotional intelligence, the mean is negative (-1.47), while participants with low emotional intelligence also display a negative value, with an even more pronounced tendency (-2.96). The standard deviations (SD) are similar across the three groups, ranging from 6.33 to 6.92. Participants at all three levels of emotional intelligence exhibit polar values in their interpersonal orientation, ranging from pronounced submissiveness to strong dominance.

Table 2 presents the relationship between emotional intelligence level and the Affiliation (G) vector, which reflects the extent to which an individual demonstrates cooperation, empathy, and positive social engagement.

Table 2. Comparison of emotional intelligence coefficient with Affiliation (G) vector.

Emotional Intelligence Coefficient	Affiliation (G) Vector				
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimal value	Maximal value	Median
Low	4,2	6,82	-18,8	15,3	6
Medium	3,61	6,79	-10,6	14,6	1,95
High	6,3	5,66	-8	13,3	3,4

The results demonstrate that participants across all three levels of emotional intelligence show positive scores, indicating a general tendency toward affiliation: low ($M = 4.20$), medium ($M = 3.61$), and high ($M = 6.30$). The highest mean value was observed among participants with high emotional intelligence (6.30), reflecting a stronger propensity for empathic and socially oriented behavior. The lowest standard deviation was recorded in the high emotional intelligence group ($SD = 5.66$), whereas participants with low (6.82) and medium (6.79) coefficient of emotional intelligence displayed greater variability. Within these two groups, interpersonal orientations ranged from pronounced benevolence to restrained or even hostile tendencies.

A comparative visualization of the mean values for the Dominance (D) and Affiliation (G) vectors, across low, medium, and high levels of emotional intelligence, is presented in Figure 1. The results highlight clear distinctions in interpersonal behavior styles among the three groups and confirm the primary hypothesis regarding the substantial influence of emotional intelligence on interpersonal communication. The observed differences on both vectors reached statistical significance (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$). These findings correspond with the view that individuals with high emotional intelligence exhibit a moderate and adaptive behavioral style, accompanied by elevated levels of empathy and benevolence. By contrast, participants with low emotional intelligence tend to adopt a more passive and compliant style, combined with lower or insufficiently developed benevolence.

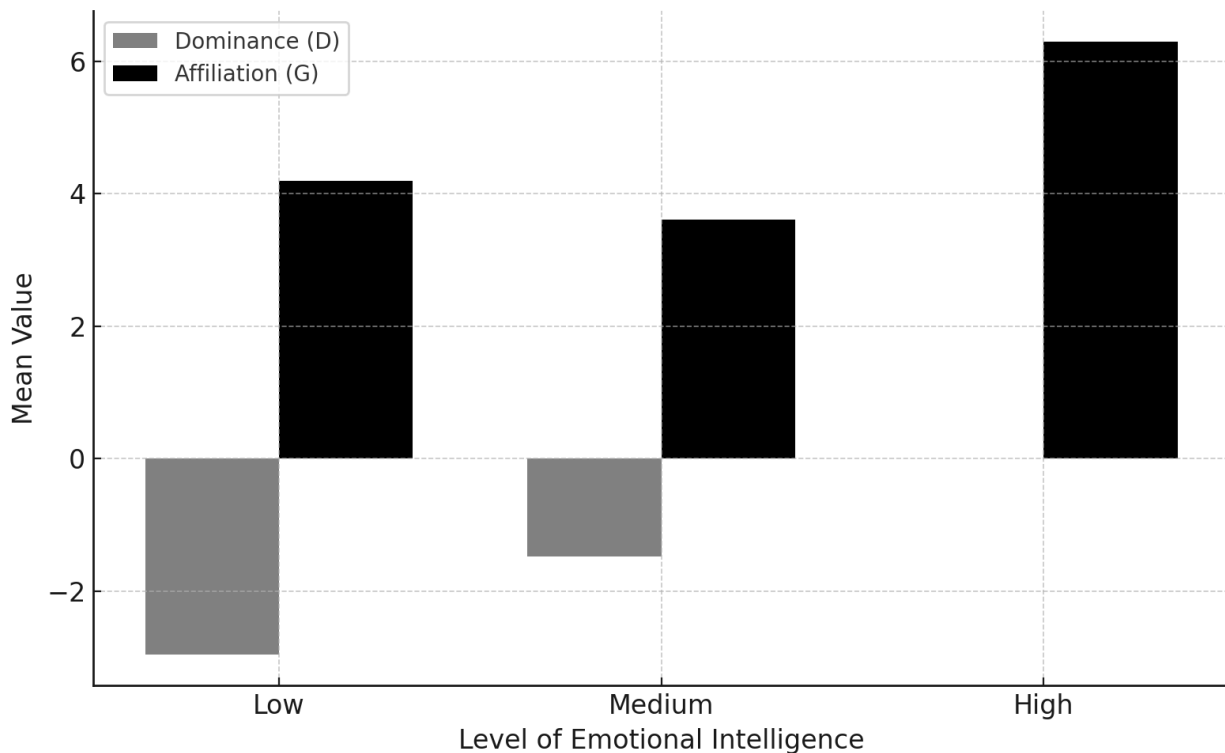


Figure 1. Distribution of the Dominance (D) and Affiliation (G) vectors across levels of emotional intelligence.

III. DISCUSSION

The findings clearly show that participants with a high emotional intelligence coefficient exhibit interpersonal behavior characterized by assertiveness, moderation, and adaptability. They demonstrate not only higher mean levels of affiliation but also lower variability, which indicates a stable and predictable style of interpersonal orientation. Such individuals are more inclined toward empathy, cooperation, and social support, and they display fewer fluctuations or abrupt changes in their behavior. They experience fewer difficulties with trust, show tolerance, and are open to collaboration, while at the same time maintaining a positive attitude towards others. They can balance their own emotions with the needs of those around them, thereby fostering stable, supportive, and harmonious relationships. This behavioral profile is fully consistent with theoretical propositions linking higher emotional intelligence to social maturity and cooperativeness.

Participants with a medium level of emotional intelligence show mean values on the Dominance (D) vector that suggest a tendency toward reduced dominance and a probable inclination toward compliance and passivity in interpersonal interactions. This pattern may be interpreted as behavior in which individuals avoid confrontation and conflict, do not assume a leading role in communication, and tend to adapt to their social environment rather than actively shaping it.

The mean values on the Affiliation (G) vector for this group suggest a relatively well-developed capacity for empathy and cooperation. Although lower compared to participants with high emotional intelligence, the positive values reflect a general orientation toward others. These participants are likely to strive for balanced and constructive relationships, yet their ability to establish deep emotional connections and authentic understanding of others may be limited by inner ambivalence or a lack of social initiative. The interpersonal profile of individuals with medium emotional intelligence thus reveals a certain balance in communication style: neither highly dominant nor excessively passive but also lacking the pronounced empathic orientation and adaptive maturity observed in those with high emotional intelligence. Their behavior is stable, though with less emotional depth.

For participants with low emotional intelligence, the mean value on the Dominance (D) vector is distinctly negative, indicating a marked tendency toward passivity, withdrawal, and avoidance of socially dominant roles. Such individuals often avoid confrontation, refrain from taking initiative in interpersonal communication, and experience difficulties in maintaining personal boundaries. Their behavior may be driven more by a desire for harmony and the avoidance of tension than by inner emotional awareness or self-confidence. As a result, they are more vulnerable to external influences and more reactive to social pressure, which can be explained by a lack of self-awareness and self-regulation.

Interestingly, the values on the Affiliation (G) vector for this group exceed those of participants with medium emotional intelligence. At first glance, this may appear paradoxical, since benevolence is typically associated with higher emotional maturity. Nevertheless, this result may be interpreted as an internal disposition among some participants toward cooperation and empathy, as well as a compensatory mechanism that facilitates balance and interaction with others. Such a form of positive interpersonal orientation may be intuitive or personality-driven, but not always functionally adaptive in socially or emotionally demanding situations. It is also important to note the higher level of dispersion in the results, reflected in the wide range between minimum and maximum values. This indicates that participants with low emotional intelligence do not form a homogeneous group; on the contrary, there is high variability in Affiliation (G) scores.

IV. CONCLUSION

The theoretical overview and the conducted empirical study highlight the pivotal role of emotional intelligence in shaping interpersonal relationships. Overall, emotional intelligence demonstrates a positive influence on social interactions: higher levels are associated with balanced behavior characterized by neutral dominance and elevated affiliation. On the other hand, lower levels tend to predispose individuals to passivity, reduced self-confidence, and avoidance of active communication—despite the presence of relatively high benevolence.

The findings confirm the leading function of emotional intelligence as an internal resource for self-regulation, social effectiveness, and the formation of sustainable human relationships. In this sense, emotional intelligence should not be regarded solely as a personality trait but rather as a key social factor, whose purposeful support and development ought to be a priority within educational, social, and psychotherapeutic practice.

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