# Role of Gender and Psychological Factors in Choice of Educational Streams – A Study among College Students

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This study examines the role of gender and psychological factors in shaping the choice of educational streams among college students within the Indian education system. A total sample of 180 students (90 males and 90 females), aged between 18 and 20 years, was selected for the investigation. Standardized psychological tools including the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS), Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS), Maudsley Personality Inventory (MPI), and Emotional Quotient Test were administered to assess differences based on gender and academic stream. The findings reveal significant gender differences in levels of perfectionism, social anxiety, and neuroticism. Additionally, variations across educational streams were observed in self-oriented perfectionism, social anxiety, emotional sensitivity, competency, and overall emotional quotient. These results suggest that psychological characteristics play a meaningful role in educational decision-making processes. The study highlights the need for targeted psychological and academic interventions to promote inclusive learning environments. Reducing the influence of societal expectations and performance-related pressures may help support students in making educational choices aligned with their interests and emotional well-being.

**Keywords:** *Gender, Perfectionism, Social Anxiety, Personality, Emotional Quotient, College Students.*

## 1. Introduction

Factors that affect the educational journey of college students include gender-based roles and psychological characteristics. College students make several important decisions in higher education regarding their academic pathways and future careers. One of the most significant decisions concerns their choice of educational

streams—selecting majors, minors, or specific academic tracks—which shape their learning aspirations as well as professional goals. These decisions are influenced by personal interests, societal norms, mindsets, and cultural backgrounds, among other factors. Therefore, it is essential for researchers, educators, and policymakers who aim to improve student success and create inclusive educational environments to understand the reasons behind these choices. Educational streams often reflect broader trends, particularly as labor markets evolve and new fields of study gain popularity. For example, the recent surge in enrollment in STEM fields can be attributed to the growing demand for skilled professionals driven by technological advancement and innovation (National Science Board, 2020). Similarly, shifts in interest toward arts and vocational courses reflect changing perceptions about the value of various forms of knowledge and skills. Moreover, educational choices have significant implications for perpetuating or reducing socio-economic inequalities. The distribution of students across different educational fields may represent broader disparities in access to opportunities influenced by socio-economic status, inequalities within the education system, and differences in cultural capital (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Students from underrepresented groups may face institutional barriers in accessing certain courses, while others may be influenced by family expectations and culturally constructed social norms when choosing their majors (Archer et al., 2012). Hence, understanding the socio-economic dimensions of educational decision-making is crucial for promoting equal opportunities within higher education institutions. The process of selecting an educational stream is complex and often uncertain. Students must evaluate multiple factors alongside numerous available alternatives. These include their interests, abilities, values, and perceived limitations. In this context, psychological traits such as personality characteristics, cognitive abilities, and emotional intelligence are linked to students' decision-making processes (Ackerman & Heggestad, 1997). Cultural beliefs about gender roles, ethnic identity, and social status also shape self-perception and aspirations, thereby influencing educational choices (Archer et al., 2013).

Gender roles significantly influence behavior, attitudes, and career preferences. Despite social progress, traditional gender stereotypes continue to affect how individuals perceive themselves and their potential career paths (Eagly & Wood, 2013). Social anxiety, characterized by fear of being judged in social situations, is a common psychological concern that can significantly impact daily functioning and overall well-being (Kessler et al., 2005). Individuals experiencing social anxiety often struggle in academic settings, work performance, interpersonal relationships, and general mental health (Bruce & Saeed, 1999). Furthermore, social anxiety is associated with increased risks of depression, substance misuse, and suicidal ideation (Lepine & Lellouch, 1995; Lipsitz & Schneier, 2000). Growing research attention has increased awareness of its importance in academic and social contexts (Walker et al., 2001). Studies also suggest that gender influences both the expression and management of social anxiety, with differences observed between males and females (Sanderson et al., 1990). Perfectionism, defined as the tendency to set excessively high standards accompanied by critical self-evaluation, also plays a role in students' academic decisions. Research suggests that perfectionistic tendencies can influence individuals to select fields of study where they believe they can meet high standards or achieve success consistent with their expectations (Frost et al., 1990). The interaction between perfectionism and societal gender norms may further influence educational and career choices. Studies by Corulla and Coghill (1991) and Harris (1993) have demonstrated that personality traits described in Eysenck's PEN model vary across academic disciplines. For example, students pursuing science degrees tend to exhibit lower levels of psychoticism and higher emotional stability, whereas students in arts and social sciences often display greater sociability and openness to experience (Harris, 1993). Additionally, research by Wankowski (1969) and McKenzie (1989) indicates that personality traits such as neuroticism and extraversion influence academic stream selection and achievement. Gender differences further contribute to variations in academic preferences, as males and females may show differing interests and personality profiles (Cowel & Entwistle, 1971; Lynn, 1959; Wankowski, 1969). Emotional Quotient (EQ) has

increasingly been recognized as an important determinant of individual and professional success **(Goleman, 1995)**. Students with higher emotional intelligence are less likely to experience psychological distress, perform better academically, and often achieve leadership positions in organizations **(Petrides, 2001)**. Therefore, understanding the role of emotional intelligence in educational decision-making can inform interventions aimed at enhancing students' academic success and emotional well-being. Thus, gender and psychological determinants are important factors influencing college students' choice of educational streams. The present study aims to explore the role of gender and psychological variables—including social anxiety, perfectionism, personality traits, and emotional quotient—in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of how these factors contribute to educational stream selection among college-level students.

## 2. Review of Literature

Many previous investigations can be related to the present study. Therefore, an attempt has been made to provide a detailed review of studies on social anxiety, perfectionism, personality, emotional quotient, educational streams, and gender-related variables conducted over the past years. The review includes research findings that are closely linked or relevant to the current investigation. Several research studies have explored gender differences in psychological characteristics such as personality, emotional intelligence, social anxiety, and perfectionism. **Poropat (2009)** suggested that individuals with high levels of conscientiousness are more likely to pursue demanding and structured career paths such as engineering or medicine. In contrast, individuals who are open to experience may be more inclined toward artistic or liberal arts professions **(Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003)**. Differences in personality traits between genders, such as agreeableness and neuroticism, may also influence career and educational decisions **(Schmitt et al., 2008)**. In a similar context, **Ranasinghe et al. (2017)**, in their study among medical undergraduates, found that emotional intelligence is associated with better academic performance and lower perceived stress. Researchers have extensively examined psychological differences between males and females and the role gender plays in these variations. For instance, **Juster et al. (1991)** reported that individuals with higher levels of social anxiety tend to exhibit perfectionistic tendencies. Other researchers have identified gender differences in perceptions of empathy and emotional understanding **(Naghavi & Redzuan, 2011)**. Additionally, studies have examined traditional gender-role expectations and how social anxiety may vary according to gender identity **(Turk et al., 1998)**. A longitudinal study conducted by **Hewitt and Flett (1991)** among college students revealed a positive relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and academic performance. Furthermore, **Stoeber and Otto (2006)** examined the predictive role of perfectionism in high school students' academic achievement. **Rice and Preusser (2002)** investigated the motivational foundations of perfectionism and their impact on learning outcomes. Similarly, **Flett et al. (2002)** explored how perfectionism among college students predicts academic procrastination. **Chang (2003)** examined long-term relationships between adolescent depression symptoms, academic stress, and depressive outcomes. Additionally, **Dunkley et al. (2000)** studied how perfectionistic tendencies contribute to burnout among college students. The above review highlights certain research gaps regarding how students' psychological characteristics and gender influence their educational stream selection. Many studies have not included a sufficiently diverse sample of students from varied socio-cultural backgrounds. There is limited research focusing specifically on how students' thoughts, emotions, and psychological traits directly influence their choice of academic streams. Moreover, there is a lack of longitudinal studies that track students over time to understand how their educational decisions evolve.

## 3. Objectives
### General Objective

The present study aims to determine the role of gender and psychological factors (perfectionism, social anxiety, personality, and Emotional Quotient) in the choice of educational streams among college students.

## Specific Objectives

- ➢ To examine whether there are differences or associations between male and female college students in terms of their levels of perfectionism, social anxiety, personality traits, and Emotional Quotient.
- ➢ To compare differences, if any, among students studying various courses with respect to their levels of perfectionism, social anxiety, personality traits, and Emotional Quotient.

The purpose of the present study is to determine the role of gender and psychological factors (perfectionism, social anxiety, personality, and Emotional Quotient) in the choice of educational streams among college students.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Variables

#### 4.1.1 Independent Variables
a) Gender
b) Educational streams of the students

#### 4.1.2 Dependent Variables
a) Perfectionism levels (Self-Oriented, Other-Oriented, Socially Prescribed)
b) Social Anxiety
c) Personality (Neuroticism and Extraversion)
d) Emotional Quotient (Emotional Sensitivity, Emotional Maturity, Emotional Competency)

#### 4.1.3 Control Variables
a) Age – 18 to 20 years
b) Socio-economic Status – Middle-income group

### 4.2 Procedure

The present study was designed to examine the role of gender and psychological factors (perfectionism, social anxiety, personality, and Emotional Quotient) in the choice of educational streams among college students. Participants were selected from the departments of MBBS, Engineering, Law, English Honours, and Mathematics Honours. Permission to conduct the study during class hours was obtained from the Heads of the respective Departments.

Senior students were excluded from the study as they were considered to be more socially adjusted compared to freshers or junior students, which might have influenced the data. The selected participants were aged between 18 and 20 years and belonged to middle-income group families. The sample comprised the following:
- ➢ 40 MBBS students
- ➢ 30 Mathematics students
- ➢ 40 Law students
- ➢ 40 Engineering students
- ➢ 30 English Honours students

Responses to demographic variables were tabulated, and graphs were prepared and interpreted carefully. After data collection, scoring was conducted according to the respective scale manuals. Statistical techniques such as t-test, ANOVA, Tukey's test, and Chi-square test (with Yates correction) were used for data analysis.

### 4.3 Sampling

#### 4.3.1 Method of Sampling

The sampling method used for this study was Convenience Sampling along with partial Stratified Sampling.

#### 4.3.2 Size of The Sample

The sample size refers to the total number of participants selected for the study. In this research, the sample consisted of 180 participants (90 males and 90 females), aged between 18 and 20 years.

### 4.4 Scales Used

A total of four standardized scales were used:

#### 4.4.1 Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) developed by Hewitt and Flett (1990).
It measures Self-Oriented Perfectionism (SOP), Other-Oriented Perfectionism (OOP), and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism (SPP).
- ➢ 45 items
- ➢ 7-point Likert scale
- ➢ Reliability: SOP ($\alpha$ = 0.89), OOP ($\alpha$ = 0.79), SPP ($\alpha$ = 0.86)

#### 4.4.2 Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) developed by Mattick and Clarke (1989). It measures anxiety experienced in social situations.
- ➢ 20 items
- ➢ 5-point Likert scale

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional Sensitivity | .341 | 178 | .734 |
| Emotional Maturity | .612 | 178 | .541 |
| Emotional Competency | .843 | 178 | .400 |
| Total Emotional Quotient | .919 | 178 | .359 |

Table 1 presents the differences between male and female college students in terms of their psychological factor scores. The t-test was conducted at the 5% level of significance. Perfectionism was assessed through three dimensions—Self-Oriented, Other-Oriented, and Socially Prescribed—using the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale.

The results indicate that females scored significantly higher than males in the following dimensions:
- Self-Oriented Perfectionism (t = 2.968, p = .003)
- Other-Oriented Perfectionism (t = 1.872, p = .043)
- Socially Prescribed Perfectionism (t = 1.454, p = .038)
- Social Anxiety (t = .130, p = .007)
- Neuroticism (t = 2.320, p = .021)

These findings suggest that female students exhibit higher levels of perfectionism, social anxiety, and neurotic traits compared to male students. This may be attributed to societal pressures and historical gender inequalities that influence females to strive for higher standards and experience greater emotional reactivity.

No significant gender differences were observed in Extraversion, Emotional Sensitivity, Emotional Maturity, Emotional Competency, or Total Emotional Quotient.

## 4.4.3 Maudsley Personality Inventory (MPI)
designed by H.J. Eysenck (1959). It measures two personality dimensions:
- Neuroticism
- Extraversion

## 4.4.4 Emotional Quotient Test developed by Dr. Dalip Singh and Dr. N.K. Chadha (2003).
It measures:
- Emotional Sensitivity
- Emotional Maturity
- Emotional Competency
- 22 items
- Test-retest reliability: 0.94
- Split-half reliability: 0.89
- Validity: 0.89

## 4.5 Statistical Techniques Used
To test the hypotheses of the study, the following statistical techniques were used for data analysis:
- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- t-test (Two-tailed)
- One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)
- Tukey's Post Hoc Test
- Chi-square test (with Yates correction)

## 5. Result Tables and Discussion
The study was conducted among 180 college students (90 males and 90 females) aged between 18–20 years, enrolled in various educational streams. Data were first collected using a demographic questionnaire, followed by the administration of standardized psychological scales.

### Table No. 1 – t-test

| Dimensions | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Self-Oriented | 2.968 | 178 | .003 |
| Other-Oriented | 1.872 | 178 | .043 |
| Socially Prescribed | 1.454 | 178 | .038 |
| Social Anxiety | .130 | 178 | .007 |
| Extraversion | .291 | 178 | .772 |
| Neuroticism | 2.320 | 178 | .021 |

### Table No. 2 – One-Way Anova

| Dimensions | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Self-Oriented** | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 3824.992 | 4 | 956.248 | 5.622 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 29767.808 | 175 | 170.102 | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 33592.800 | 179 | | | |
| **Other-Oriented** | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 144.869 | 4 | 36.217 | .339 | .852 |
| Within Groups | 18721.042 | 175 | 106.977 | | |
| Total | 18865.911 | 179 | | | |
| **Socially Prescribed** | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 574.278 | 4 | 143.569 | .806 | .523 |
| Within Groups | 31177.383 | 175 | 178.156 | | |
| Total | 31751.661 | 179 | | | |
| **Social Anxiety** | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 2661.917 | 4 | 665.479 | 5.046 | .001 |
| Within Groups | 23080.633 | 175 | 131.889 | | |
| Total | 25742.550 | 179 | | | |
| **Extraversion** | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 4.108 | 4 | 1.027 | .241 | .915 |
| Within Groups | 744.692 | 175 | 4.255 | | |
| Total | 748.800 | 179 | | | |
| **Neuroticism** | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 10.128 | 4 | 2.532 | .850 | .496 |
| Within Groups | 521.533 | 175 | 2.980 | | |
| Total | 531.661 | 179 | | | |
| **Emotional Sensitivity** | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 3451.736 | 4 | 862.939 | 5.549 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 27212.708 | 175 | 155.501 | | |
| Total | 30664.444 | 179 | | | |
| **Emotional Maturity** | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 1553.403 | 4 | 388.351 | 2.234 | .067 |
| Within Groups | 30424.375 | 175 | 173.854 | | |
| Total | 31977.778 | 179 | | | |
| **Emotional Competency** | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 10173.403 | 4 | 2543.351 | 7.744 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 57476.042 | 175 | 328.435 | | |
| Total | 67649.444 | 179 | | | |
| **Total Emotional Quotient** | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 33023.036 | 4 | 8255.759 | 7.921 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 182388.608 | 175 | 1042.221 | | |
| Total | 215411.644 | 179 | | | |

Table 2 presents the One-Way ANOVA results at the 5% level of significance, showing whether significant differences exist among students from various educational streams with respect to psychological factors.

Significant differences were found in:
- Self-Oriented Perfectionism: $F_{(4,175)}$ = 5.622, p = .000
- Social Anxiety: $F_{(4,175)}$ = 5.046, p = .001
- Emotional Sensitivity: $F_{(4,175)}$ = 5.549, p = .000
- Emotional Competency: $F_{(4,175)}$ = 7.744, p = .000
- Total Emotional Quotient: $F_{(4,175)}$ = 7.921, p = .000

Post hoc Tukey's Test indicated that Literature students differed significantly from Mathematics, MBBS, Engineering, and Law students in Total Emotional Quotient, Emotional Sensitivity, Social Anxiety, and Self-Oriented Perfectionism. Engineering students differed from Law and Literature students in Emotional Competency.

These findings support Holland's (1976, 1985) Person–Environment Fit Theory, suggesting that students select educational environments that align with their personality traits. Science-oriented students (Mathematics, MBBS, Engineering) appeared more introverted and socially anxious, with lower emotional sensitivity compared to Literature students. This demonstrates how personality and emotional traits may influence, and be influenced by, educational stream selection.

**Table No. 3 – Chi-Square (Yates Correction) Test (Gender)**

| Dimension | Chi-Square | df | Asymp. Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Self-Oriented | 105.633 | 56 | .000 |
| Other-Oriented | 124.578 | 43 | .000 |
| Socially Prescribed | 85.144 | 48 | .001 |
| Social Anxiety | 85.767 | 50 | .001 |
| Extraversion | 59.400 | 8 | .000 |
| Neuroticism | 56.178 | 7 | .000 |
| Emotional Sensitivity | 108.400 | 11 | .000 |
| Emotional Maturity | 119.444 | 13 | .000 |
| Emotional Competency | 100.567 | 18 | .000 |
| Total Emotional Quotient | 136.433 | 32 | .000 |
| Educational Stream | 3.333 | 4 | .504 |

The Chi-square test with Yates correction, conducted at the 5% level of significance, revealed significant associations between gender and most psychological factors. Since the obtained p-values were less than 0.05 in nearly all cases, the null hypothesis was rejected for those variables.

However, no significant association was found for Educational Stream (p = .504).

These findings suggest that gender is significantly associated with variations in psychological characteristics among college students. This may be influenced by the social and developmental context of the college population, where gender roles and psychological factors interact within academic environments.

## 6. Limitations of the Study

The present study is not free from limitations. Certain constraints should be acknowledged:
➢ The duration of the research study was short.
➢ The sample was restricted to the city of Kolkata due to ease of access, and convenience sampling was used for data collection.
➢ The sample size could have been larger and more diverse, particularly with respect to socio-economic status (SES).

## 7. Recommendations for Future Study
➢ More specific age-group divisions may yield more comprehensive and detailed results.
➢ Longitudinal studies conducted over an extended period may help in drawing more conclusive findings.

## 8. Conclusion

From the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that gender and psychological attributes—such as perfectionism, social anxiety, personality traits, and emotional intelligence—play a significant role in the choice of educational streams among college students. The results indicate that female students exhibit higher levels of perfectionism (self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed), social anxiety, and neuroticism compared to male students. This suggests that societal gender expectations, combined with psychological characteristics, may influence students' academic decisions and experiences.

However, no significant gender differences were observed in extraversion, emotional sensitivity, emotional maturity, or emotional competency. This indicates that certain psychological traits may be less influenced by gender and may operate independently of traditional gender-based expectations.

The study also revealed differences in psychological profiles across various educational streams. Students pursuing Literature demonstrated higher levels of emotional sensitivity, social anxiety, and self-oriented perfectionism. In contrast, students in STEM-related fields such as Mathematics, MBBS, and Engineering tended to exhibit higher introversion and greater social anxiety. Law students displayed a relatively balanced profile, combining characteristics of both humanities and more structured professional domains.

These findings are consistent with Holland's (1976, 1985) Person–Environment Fit Theory, which proposes that individuals are drawn to academic and occupational environments that align with their personality traits and emotional dispositions. The significant association between gender and psychological variables, as indicated by the Chi-square analysis, further suggests that psychological traits are shaped not only by inherent characteristics but also by socialization processes and educational experiences.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of incorporating psychological well-being considerations into academic and career guidance programs. Understanding the interaction between gender and psychological factors can assist educators, counselors, and policymakers in creating supportive and inclusive educational environments that promote informed and balanced career decision-making.

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