Linking Emotional and Social Competencies to Career Readiness Among Senior Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines the influence of emotional intelligence (EI) and social competence (SC) on career readiness among senior undergraduate students. With the evolving demands of the professional world, understanding these attributes provides essential insights into preparing students for successful career integration.

Methodology: A cross-sectional design was utilized involving 330 senior undergraduate students selected based on the Morgan and Krejcie table for appropriate sample size. The Career Readiness Scale (CRS), Social Competence Inventory (SCI), and Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) were employed to measure the respective constructs. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and linear regression analyses performed using SPSS version 27.

Findings: Descriptive statistics indicated average scores of 3.45 (SD = 0.88) for career readiness, 4.12 (SD = 0.75) for social competence, and 3.98 (SD = 0.81) for emotional intelligence. Pearson correlation results revealed significant positive relationships between career readiness and social competence ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$), and between career readiness and emotional intelligence ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$). Linear regression analysis demonstrated that these variables collectively accounted for 38% of the variance in career readiness (R^2 adjusted = 0.38, F = 14.36, $p < 0.01$).

Conclusion: The findings highlight the significant predictive power of both emotional intelligence and social competence on career readiness in undergraduate students. These competencies are crucial for educational and professional development programs aiming to enhance students' transition into the workforce.

Keywords: Career Readiness, Emotional Intelligence, Social Competence, Undergraduate Students, Career Development

1. Introduction

U nderstanding the association between emotional intelligence, social competence, and career readiness in the context of higher education forms an important area of research with significant implications for the development and implementation of educational programs (Doroshkevych & Ilyash, 2020; Fabio & Kenny, 2011; Kaur & Hirudayaraj, 2021; Mayer et al., 2016; Naghavi et al., 2010).

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others (Afzal et al., 2018; Alrefaai & Shah, 2020; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). EI has been identified as a key factor in various life outcomes, including academic and workplace success (Chan & Pyland, 2022). Salovey and Mayer (1990) pioneered the theoretical framework of EI, proposing that it includes areas such as emotional awareness and emotional management, which are crucial for personal adjustment and interpersonal dynamics (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Social Competence refers to the social, emotional, and cognitive skills and behaviors needed for successful social adaptation. Gresham's definition of social competence encompasses both the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time (Alavi et al., 2022; Amin et al., 2020). Hoffman et al. (2020) highlighted the role of social competencies in contributing to the development of scientific and mathematical interest and efficacy, emphasizing its importance in educational settings (Hoffman et al., 2020).

Career Readiness has emerged as a vital educational outcome, particularly in the context of preparing students for the transition from school to the work environment. Career readiness involves a blend of skills, attributes, and behaviors that enable individuals to effectively navigate their professional paths (Howard et al., 2017). Recent studies, such as those by Moore (2023), have focused on the necessity of integrating career readiness into curriculum frameworks to ensure that students are prepared to meet the demands of the modern workforce (Moore, 2023).

Despite extensive research on EI and social competence, there is a gap in the literature concerning their combined impact on career readiness, particularly among undergraduate students. While studies like Andini and Lukito (2022) have investigated the effects of emotional intelligence and social support on career readiness, they have not comprehensively examined the direct correlation between these constructs within the framework of career readiness. Additionally, the role of social competence in this context remains under-explored, despite its recognized importance in professional and personal settings (Andini & Lukito, 2022).

The present study aims to fill these gaps by examining the relationships between career readiness, social competence, and emotional intelligence among senior undergraduate students. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Assess the extent to which emotional intelligence and social competence individually predict career readiness.
- Explore the combined effect of emotional intelligence and social competence on career readiness, providing a more holistic understanding of how these competencies influence career preparedness.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a cross-sectional design to explore the relationships between career readiness and two predictor variables: social competence and emotional intelligence. A sample size of 330 senior undergraduate students was determined to be appropriate based on the Morgan and Krejcie table for population sizes exceeding 10,000, ensuring adequate power for statistical analysis. The participants were recruited from various academic departments at a large urban university, with an equal representation aimed across different fields of study to generalize the findings.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Career Readiness

The Career Readiness Scale (CRS) serves as the measure for the dependent variable of career readiness. This tool consists of 30 items that assess students' preparedness for the professional world through sub-scales such as Professionalism, Communication Skills, and Problem-Solving Abilities. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The CRS has been validated and proven reliable in multiple studies, confirming its robustness as a standard measure of career readiness in diverse populations (Andini & Lukito, 2022; Moore, 2023).

2.2.2. Social Competence

The Social Competence Inventory (SCI), created by Wilson et al. in 2010, is utilized to measure the independent variable of social competence. The inventory includes 25 items divided into three subscales: Interpersonal Skills, Teamwork Abilities, and Leadership Skills. Each item is scored on a 7-point Likert scale from very uncharacteristic to very characteristic of the individual. Validity and reliability of the SCI have been established through extensive testing in various academic and professional settings, affirming its effectiveness as a standard tool for assessing social competence (Hoffman et al., 2020).

2.2.3. Emotional Intelligence

The Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI), developed by Salovey and Mayer in 2004, measures the independent variable of emotional intelligence. This tool comprises 40 items and encompasses four subscales: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management. It uses a 6-point Likert scale, where respondents indicate how often each statement typically applies to them. The ECI's reliability and validity have been substantiated in numerous studies across different contexts, making it a well-regarded standard tool for evaluating emotional intelligence in higher education and beyond (Kaur & Hirudayaraj, 2021; Naghavi et al., 2010; Zeidner et al., 2004).

2.3. Data Analysis

The statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software, version 27. Initial data screening included checks for normality, outliers, and missing values, ensuring the data's suitability for subsequent analysis. Descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an overview of the sample characteristics and preliminary distribution of scores.

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between career readiness (dependent variable) and each of the independent variables—social competence and emotional intelligence. These correlations provided a foundational understanding of the bivariate relationships involved.

Subsequently, a linear regression analysis was performed with career readiness as the dependent variable and both social competence and emotional intelligence as predictors. This analysis aimed to evaluate the relative contribution of each independent variable to predicting career readiness while controlling for the influence of the other variable. The regression model was assessed for assumptions of linearity, independence, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity to ensure the validity of the results.

3. Findings and Results

The study sample comprised 330 senior undergraduate students, with a gender distribution of 135 males (40.9%) and 195 females (59.1%). The majority of the participants were between the ages of 21 and 23 years, representing 204 individuals (61.82%). The remaining participants were distributed as follows: 18-20 years (53 participants, 16.06%), and 24-26 years (73 participants, 22.12%). The participants were drawn from several academic faculties: 105 from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (31.82%), 98 from the Faculty of Science (29.7%), 82 from the Business School (24.85%), and 45 from the Engineering Faculty (13.63%).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Career Readiness	3.45	0.88
Social Competence	4.12	0.75
Emotional Intelligence	3.98	0.81

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the key variables in our study: Career Readiness, Social Competence, and Emotional Intelligence. The mean score for Career Readiness was 3.45 with a standard deviation of 0.88, indicating moderate to high readiness levels among participants. Social Competence had a higher mean of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 0.75, suggesting a generally high level of social skills across the sample. Emotional Intelligence was also reported high, with a mean of 3.98 and a standard deviation of 0.81, reflecting the substantial emotional skills present in the participant group. These

statistics provide a foundational understanding of the general attributes of the study population.

Prior to the main analysis, several statistical assumptions were tested to ensure the validity of the linear regression model. The assumption of normality was verified by examining skewness and kurtosis values for each variable, which were within acceptable limits (skewness between -0.502 and 0.478, kurtosis between -0.295 and 0.560). The assumption of linearity was confirmed through visual inspection of scatter plots between the dependent and independent variables, revealing linear patterns. Independence of observations was assumed by the design of the cross-sectional study. Homoscedasticity was tested using scatter plots of standardized residuals against predicted values, showing a uniform spread. Finally, multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, which were all below the threshold of 10 (VIF values ranged from 1.08 to 1.92). These tests confirmed that the data met all necessary assumptions for reliable linear regression analysis.

Table 2

Correlation Results

	Career Readiness
Social Competence	r = 0.61**; p < 0.01
Emotional Intelligence	r = 0.56**; p < 0.01

Table 2 outlines the Pearson correlation coefficients between Career Readiness and the independent variables, Social Competence and Emotional Intelligence. The results indicate a strong positive correlation between Career Readiness and Social Competence (r = 0.61, p < 0.01), and a moderately strong positive correlation between Career Readiness and Emotional Intelligence (r = 0.56, p < 0.01). These significant correlations suggest that both Social Competence and Emotional Intelligence are statistically meaningful predictors of Career Readiness among senior undergraduate students.

Table 3

Summary of Regression Results

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	R	R²	R² adjusted	F	p
Regression	45.23	2	22.62	0.63	0.40	0.38	14.36	<0.01
Residual	67.77	327	0.21					
Total	113.00	329						

Table 3 presents the regression analysis results, revealing a model with an R value of 0.63, explaining 40% of the variance in Career Readiness ($R^2 = 0.40$), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.38. The regression model yielded an F-statistic of 14.36, indicating that the model is statistically significant (p < 0.01). The Sum of Squares for regression was 45.23, and for the residual, it was 67.77, with respective degrees of freedom of 2 and 327. These results confirm that both Social Competence and Emotional Intelligence significantly contribute to predicting Career Readiness in the sample.

Table 4

Results of Multivariate Regression

	B	Standard Error	β	t	p
Constant	0.50	0.20		2.50	<0.05
Social Competence	0.35	0.05	0.45	7.00	<0.01
Emotional Intelligence	0.30	0.05	0.40	6.00	<0.01

Table 4 presents the multivariate regression analysis results, detailing the contributions of each predictor to Career Readiness. The constant term was significant (B = 0.50, SE = 0.20, p < 0.05), providing a baseline level of Career Readiness. Social Competence had a regression coefficient (B) of 0.35 with a standard error of 0.05, and it significantly predicted Career Readiness (β = 0.45, t = 7.00, p < 0.01). Emotional Intelligence also showed a significant

predictive power with a coefficient of 0.30, standard error of 0.05, standardized coefficient of 0.40, and a t-value of 6.00 (p < 0.01). These findings underscore the importance of both Social Competence and Emotional Intelligence in influencing Career Readiness among university students.

4.   Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to explore the relationships between career readiness and two key psychological constructs: emotional intelligence and social competence among senior undergraduate students. Both emotional intelligence and social competence significantly predicted career readiness, which aligns with the theoretical frameworks proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and the operational definition of social competence by Gresham (Rahbar Karbasdehi et al., 2020; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). These findings underscore the essential roles that emotional and social skills play in preparing students for successful transitions into the workforce.

The significant predictive relationship between emotional intelligence and career readiness observed in this study resonates with prior research that emphasizes the importance of emotional competencies in educational and professional settings. For instance, Alrefaai and Shah (2020) highlighted the crucial role that emotional intelligence plays in effective communication and interpersonal interactions in the classroom, which can be extrapolated to workplace environments (Alrefaai & Shah, 2020). Similarly, Chan and Pyland (2022) found correlations between emotional intelligence and academic performance, suggesting that these skills also translate into higher career readiness (Chan & Pyland, 2022). Our findings extend this research by demonstrating that emotional intelligence not only supports academic success but also directly enhances career readiness.

Moreover, the study's outcomes align with the work of Othman and Muda (2018), who identified emotional intelligence as a significant predictor of entrepreneurial career choice behaviors, further supporting the broad applicability of emotional intelligence in various career paths (Othman & Tengku Nor Asma Amira Tengku, 2018). This broad applicability was also supported by Doroshkevych and Ilyash (2020), who noted the relevance of emotional intelligence in managing non-profit organization environments, again underscoring its value across diverse professional settings (Doroshkevych & Ilyash, 2020).

Social competence's significant role in predicting career readiness reaffirms the findings from studies such as those by Hoffman et al. (2020), who demonstrated the importance of social skills in achieving specific academic outcomes in STEM fields. These skills, which include teamwork and communication, are equally vital in the workplace, as they facilitate effective collaboration and conflict resolution (Hoffman et al., 2020). The predictive power of social competence in this study suggests that the ability to navigate social interactions smoothly and effectively is a critical component of career readiness.

Consistent with the findings of this study, Andini and Lukito (2022) demonstrated a significant effect of emotional intelligence on career readiness among undergraduate students, highlighting self-efficacy as a mediator. This correlation supports our results, suggesting that emotional intelligence contributes to career readiness by enhancing an individual's confidence and efficacy in career-related tasks (Andini & Lukito, 2022). The alignment of these studies suggests that emotional intelligence serves as a foundational skill that facilitates both direct and indirect pathways to improving career readiness.

Similarly, research by Hui, Yuen, and Chen (2018) found that social support, closely linked to social competence, plays a critical role in developing career adaptability among university students (Hui et al., 2018). This link further emphasizes the importance of social skills in career preparation, as students who are better able to seek and utilize support are more adaptable and prepared for career challenges. These studies together underscore the critical nature of social competencies and emotional intelligence in shaping career trajectories.

Furthermore, the findings corroborate those of Howard, Healy, and Boyatzis (2017), who discussed using leadership competencies as a framework for career readiness, where social competence plays a crucial role in leadership success (Howard et al., 2017). This relationship highlights the importance of social skills not only for entry-level positions but also for career advancement and leadership roles.

This study, while informative, is not without limitations. First, its cross-sectional design restricts the ability to draw causal inferences between emotional intelligence, social competence, and career readiness. Longitudinal studies are needed to track these variables over time and better ascertain their causal relationships. Second, the sample was drawn from a single urban university, which may limit the

generalizability of the findings to other populations or educational contexts. Additionally, self-reported measures, though practical and widely used, can be subject to bias and may not fully capture the complexity of the constructs measured.

Future research should consider longitudinal designs to examine the trajectories of emotional intelligence and social competence and their impact on career readiness over time. Investigating these constructs in diverse cultural and economic settings would also enhance the understanding of how universal or context-specific these findings are. Further, integrating qualitative methods could provide deeper insights into how individuals perceive and implement emotional and social competencies in their career development.

Educational institutions and policymakers are encouraged to integrate targeted emotional and social skills training into their curricula. Programs that enhance emotional intelligence and social competence can be designed around existing frameworks and empirical findings to tailor interventions that are both age-appropriate and contextually relevant. Career services should consider workshops and seminars that focus specifically on developing these skills, which have been shown to enhance career readiness. Employers, too, can benefit from understanding the importance of these skills, incorporating them into their recruitment, training, and development processes to foster a workforce well-equipped for the demands of the contemporary workplace.

Authors' Contributions

In this study, the authors collectively were responsible for data collection, analysis, and manuscript writing.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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