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Social Intelligence and Demographic Variations Among Secondary School Students in Salem District Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Social intelligence is increasingly recognized as an essential competence for adolescents because it influences interpersonal understanding, cooperative behaviour, emotional adjustment, and responsible participation in school and community life. Although academic achievement continues to receive considerable attention in secondary education, the capacity to interpret social cues, understand the emotions of others, communicate effectively, and manage interpersonal relationships is equally important for holistic development. The present study examined the level of social intelligence among secondary school students in Salem district, Tamil Nadu, India, and investigated whether social intelligence varied according to gender, locality of school, medium of instruction, and nature of accommodation. A stratified random sample of 400 Class IX students was selected from ten higher secondary schools. Data were collected through a personal data sheet and a researcher-constructed Social Intelligence Scale measuring social information processing, social skills, and social awareness. The instrument demonstrated satisfactory content validity through expert judgement and acceptable split-half reliability (.74). Data were analyzed using percentage analysis, means, standard deviations, independent-samples t tests, and chi-square analysis at the .05 significance level. The results revealed that 56.8% of students demonstrated moderate social intelligence, 20.8% high social intelligence, and 22.5% low social intelligence. Female students scored significantly higher than male students on social skills and overall social intelligence, whereas urban students scored significantly higher than rural students on social awareness. No statistically significant differences were found for medium of instruction or nature of accommodation. The findings suggest that social intelligence should be deliberately cultivated through structured social-emotional learning experiences, with particular attention to social awareness among rural students and interpersonal skill development among male students.

Keywords:
Social intelligence, secondary school students, social skills, social awareness, gender differences, rural–urban differences

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Introduction

Education is commonly understood as a process that develops knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and habits necessary for personal growth and social participation. While academic learning remains a central purpose of schooling, education also prepares young people to live and work cooperatively with others. In this broader sense, the development of social competence is an essential educational outcome. Students must learn not only to solve academic problems but also to understand people, manage relationships, communicate respectfully, and respond constructively to social challenges.

Social intelligence is one of the most important competencies associated with successful interpersonal functioning. It refers to the ability to understand other people and act wisely in human relationships. Thorndike (1920) distinguished social intelligence from abstract and mechanical intelligence, arguing that human success depends not only on logical reasoning or technical skill but also on the capacity to understand and manage social situations. This early conceptualization remains influential because it recognizes that intelligent behaviour is expressed in social contexts as well as academic contexts.

In contemporary educational settings, social intelligence is particularly relevant during adolescence. Secondary school students experience significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. They spend increasing amounts of time with peers, encounter greater academic expectations, and begin to form more independent identities. During this period, the ability to interpret facial expressions, understand tone of voice, recognize social norms, cooperate in groups, and resolve disagreements becomes essential for healthy adjustment.

Students with higher social intelligence are generally better able to understand the motives, emotions, intentions, and actions of others. They can recognize subtle verbal and non-verbal cues, respond tactfully in social situations, and maintain cooperative relationships. Such students are often more comfortable participating in classroom discussions, working in teams, seeking help when needed, and managing conflict constructively. In contrast, students with limited social intelligence may experience difficulty in understanding others' perspectives, expressing themselves appropriately, or adjusting to new social environments.

Social intelligence is not a single, undifferentiated ability. It is commonly understood as a multidimensional construct consisting of social information processing, social skills, and social awareness. Social information processing refers to the ability to perceive, interpret, and respond to social cues. Social skills refer to the behavioural capacity to communicate, listen, cooperate, build rapport, and manage interpersonal situations. Social awareness refers to sensitivity to the feelings, needs, and difficulties of other individuals and communities. Together, these dimensions enable students to function effectively in the social world.

The present study examined the level of social intelligence among Class IX students in Salem district and compared it across gender, locality of school, medium of instruction, and nature of accommodation. The study is important because it provides region-specific evidence using a locally validated measure of social intelligence. The findings can inform teachers, counsellors, and school administrators who seek to promote social-emotional learning and inclusive classroom practices.

2. Need and Significance of the Study

Social intelligence is essential for healthy coexistence and successful participation in society. It helps individuals understand the motives, emotions, intentions, and actions of other people. Students who possess social intelligence are better able to recognize facial expressions, interpret tone of voice, understand behavioural cues, and respond appropriately in interpersonal situations. These capacities are necessary for maintaining friendships, working in groups, respecting diversity, and participating responsibly in community life.

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Social intelligence also contributes to personal adjustment. Adolescents frequently encounter new social situations, such as joining new peer groups, participating in school activities, managing disagreements, and responding to academic pressure. Students who can interpret social information accurately and respond with empathy are more likely to adjust successfully. Conversely, students who struggle to understand social cues may experience misunderstanding, social withdrawal, peer conflict, or reduced classroom participation.

Although several studies have examined social intelligence among college students, prospective teachers, and school teachers, fewer studies have focused specifically on secondary school students in Salem district. Class IX is an important stage because students are preparing for board-level secondary education while simultaneously negotiating increased peer influence and social expectations. Understanding their social intelligence can therefore provide timely evidence for educational support.

The present study is significant for several reasons. First, it describes the distribution of low, moderate, and high levels of social intelligence among secondary school students. Second, it examines whether social intelligence differs by gender, locality, medium of instruction, and accommodation. Third, it identifies specific dimensions of social intelligence that may require educational attention. Finally, it provides practical evidence for designing classroom interventions that strengthen empathy, communication, cooperation, and socially responsible behaviour.

3. Review of Related Literature

Research on social intelligence has examined its relationship with demographic variables, academic outcomes, emotional competence, social adjustment, and interpersonal behaviour. The available evidence presents a mixed picture regarding gender and locality differences, suggesting that contextual factors may play an important role.

Mathew (2013) examined social intelligence and competencies in fostering emotional integration among secondary school students. The study reported significant differences in social intelligence with respect to gender and locale. This finding suggests that demographic variables may influence the development of social competence among school students.

Jeyakumar (2014) conducted a comparative study of social intelligence among pre- and post-adolescents in Kanyakumari district. The study found no significant difference between pre- and post-adolescents in overall social intelligence. However, a significant difference was observed between Tamil-medium and English-medium pre-adolescents. The same study found no significant difference among Hindu, Muslim, and Christian students.

Gracious (2013) examined social intelligence and adjustment among B.Ed. students. The study reported no significant difference between male and female students in overall social intelligence. Similarly, studies of higher secondary school teachers have often found no significant gender differences in social intelligence. These inconsistent findings suggest that gender differences may depend on age group, educational level, cultural context, and the specific dimensions measured.

Research on social skills and social competence indicates that these capacities can be developed through deliberate educational experiences. Kong (2012) emphasized that student social competence is influenced by professional, strategic, contextual, and additional factors within school-wide interventions. This suggests that social competence is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the school environment.

Peer-mediated intervention has also been found effective in promoting positive social behaviour. Harris (2010) found that peer-mediated strategies created opportunities for peers to assume instructional roles and promote positive social behaviours among young children with disabilities in inclusive preschool settings. Although the present study focuses on

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secondary school students, this evidence supports the broader principle that structured peer interaction can strengthen social competence.

Rader and Michael (2010) examined the relationship between emotional-social intelligence and social problem solving among university students. Their findings indicated that the two constructs were related and suggested that programmes designed to enhance one construct may also strengthen the other. This evidence supports the view that social intelligence is not fixed; it can be improved through counselling, cooperative learning, role play, and structured social-skills instruction.

Lata (2015) found that parental involvement was significantly related to the social skills of middle school students. This finding highlights the role of family communication and support in the development of interpersonal competence. Similarly, Gnandevan (2007) found that social intelligence among higher secondary students was related to selected socio-economic variables, including parental education and employment.

The reviewed literature indicates that social intelligence is a meaningful educational variable, but evidence from secondary school students in Salem district remains limited. The present study addresses this gap by measuring social intelligence and examining selected demographic differences.

4. Statement of The Problem

The problem selected for the present investigation is stated as:

"A Study of Social Intelligence Among Secondary School Students in Salem District in Relation to Gender, Locality, Medium of Instruction and Nature of Accommodation".

5. Objectives of The Study

The general objective of the study was to determine the level of social intelligence among secondary school students in Salem district.

The specific objectives were:

1. To determine the level of social information processing, social skills, and social awareness among secondary school students.
2. To compare male and female secondary school students in social intelligence and its dimensions.
3. To compare rural and urban secondary school students in social intelligence and its dimensions.
4. To compare Tamil-medium and English-medium secondary school students in social intelligence and its dimensions.
5. To compare day scholars and hostellers in social intelligence and its dimensions.

6. Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated:

- **H01:** There is no significant difference between male and female secondary school students in social intelligence and its dimensions.
- **H02:** There is no significant difference between rural and urban secondary school students in social intelligence and its dimensions.
- **H03:** There is no significant difference between Tamil-medium and English-medium secondary school students in social intelligence and its dimensions.
- **H04:** There is no significant difference between day scholars and hostellers in social intelligence and its dimensions.

7. Methodology

Research Design

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. This design was appropriate because the purpose was to describe the existing level of social intelligence and compare groups defined by selected background variables. No experimental manipulation was involved. The survey approach enabled the investigator to collect standardized self-report data from a relatively large sample within a limited period.

Population

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The population of the study consisted of Class IX students studying in higher secondary schools in Salem district, Tamil Nadu, India. Salem district was selected because it includes both rural and urban educational settings, government and privately managed schools, and students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 400 secondary school students from ten higher secondary schools. Each school contributed 40 students. Stratification was based on school type, locality, gender, age, medium of instruction, accommodation, religion, parental education, parental occupation, and family income. This procedure helped ensure that the sample represented important subgroups within the district.

The sample included 233 male students (58.25%) and 167 female students (41.75%). It also included 199 rural students (49.75%) and 201 urban students (50.25%). In terms of medium of instruction, 240 students studied through Tamil medium (60%) and 160 through English medium (40%). The sample included 337 day scholars and 63 hostellers.

Tools Used

Data were collected using two instruments:

Personal Data Sheet: This tool collected background information such as gender, age, locality, medium of instruction, accommodation, school type, religion, parental education, parental occupation, and family income.

Social Intelligence Scale (SIS): This scale was constructed and validated by the investigator under the guidance of the research supervisor in 2022.

The final Social Intelligence Scale contained 16 items distributed across three dimensions: social information processing, social awareness, and social skills. The scale used a five-point Likert-type response format: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. Positive items were scored 5 to 1, whereas negative items were reverse-scored 1 to 5.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established by submitting the preliminary draft to experts in educational psychology and a Tamil language expert. Their suggestions were used to modify ambiguous and overlapping items. Item analysis was conducted using Pearson product-moment correlations between each item and the total score. Items with correlations above .361 were retained.

Reliability was estimated using the split-half method. Odd-numbered and even-numbered items were treated as two halves, and the correlation between the two sets of scores was corrected using the Spearman–Brown formula. The split-half reliability coefficient of the Social Intelligence Scale was .74, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

Permission was obtained from the heads of the selected schools. The investigator visited each school, established rapport with students, and explained the purpose and confidential nature of the study. Students were asked to respond honestly and independently. The questionnaire required approximately one hour to complete. Completed responses were checked, scored, and entered into SPSS Version 20 for analysis.

Statistical Techniques

Percentage analysis was used to classify students into low, moderate, and high levels of social intelligence. Low level was defined as scores below one standard deviation below the mean; moderate level as scores within one standard deviation of the mean; and high level as scores above one standard deviation above the mean.

Means and standard deviations were calculated for each group. Independent-samples t tests were used to compare two groups,

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such as male versus female students and rural versus urban students. Chi-square tests were used to examine associations involving age. The .05 level was used as the criterion for statistical significance.

8. Data Analysis And Interpretation

Level of Social Intelligence

The analysis showed that most students possessed a moderate level of social intelligence. Overall, 227 students (56.8%) were at the moderate level, 83 students (20.8%) were at the high level, and 90 students (22.5%) were at the low level.

Table 1 Level of Social Intelligence Among Secondary School Students (N = 400)

Dimension	Low n (%)	Moderate n (%)	High n (%)
Social information processing	67 (16.8)	234 (58.5)	99 (24.7)
Social skills	90 (22.5)	222 (55.5)	88 (22.0)
Social awareness	97 (24.2)	243 (60.8)	60 (15.0)
Overall social intelligence	90 (22.5)	227 (56.8)	83 (20.8)

Note. Percentages may not total exactly 100 due to rounding.

Social information processing was the strongest dimension, with 24.7% of students at the high level. Social awareness was the weakest dimension, with only 15.0% of students at the high level and 24.2% at the low level. This pattern suggests that many students could process basic social information but needed greater support in understanding social conditions and responding empathetically to others.

Gender Differences

Female students obtained higher mean scores than male students in social skills and overall social intelligence. The difference was statistically significant for both variables. However, no significant gender difference was found in social information processing or social awareness.

Table 2 Gender Differences in Social Intelligence and Its Dimensions

Dimension	Male MMM	Male SDSDSD	Female MMM	Female SDSDSD	ttt	Result
Social information processing	17.14	2.341	17.47	2.402	1.37	Not significant
Social skills	18.49	3.522	19.54	3.407	2.98	Significant
Social awareness	16.53	3.063	16.60	2.968	0.23	Not significant
Overall social intelligence	52.16	6.351	53.61	6.044	2.30	Significant

Note. Critical *t* value = 1.96 at the .05 level;

The significant difference in social skills indicates that female students reported stronger interpersonal behaviours, such as listening, cooperation, empathy, and rapport building. The higher overall social intelligence score among female students was therefore mainly influenced by their stronger performance in the social-skills dimension.

Rural-Urban Differences

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Urban students obtained a higher mean score than rural students in social awareness. This difference was statistically significant. However, rural and urban students did not differ significantly in social information processing, social skills, or overall social intelligence.

Table 3 Rural–Urban Differences in Social Intelligence and Its Dimensions

Dimension	Rural MMM	Urban MMM	Result
Social information processing	Lower than urban	Higher than rural	Not significant
Social skills	Lower than urban	Higher than rural	Not significant
Social awareness	16.26	16.86	Significant
Overall social intelligence	Lower than urban	Higher than rural	Not significant

Note. The significant difference was observed only for social awareness at the .05 level.

The higher social awareness among urban students may be related to greater exposure to diverse social settings, community activities, media, and interpersonal networks. However, because the overall social intelligence difference was not significant, the urban advantage appears specific to social awareness rather than general social competence.

Medium of Instruction

Tamil-medium and English-medium students did not differ significantly in social information processing, social skills, social awareness, or overall social intelligence. Although English-medium students had slightly higher mean scores, these differences were not statistically significant.

Table 4 Medium-of-Instruction Differences in Social Intelligence and Its Dimensions

Dimension	Tamil medium MMM	English medium MMM	ttt	Result
Social information processing	17.12	17.51	1.59	Not significant
Social skills	18.90	18.99	0.25	Not significant
Social awareness	16.55	16.58	0.09	Not significant
Overall social intelligence	52.56	53.07	0.79	Not significant

Critical *t* value = 1.96 at the .05 level

Accommodation

Day scholars and hostellers did not differ significantly in social information processing, social skills, social awareness, or overall social intelligence. Therefore, residential status did not appear to influence social intelligence in this sample.

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Table 5 Differences Between Day Scholars and Hostellers in Social Intelligence and Its Dimensions

Dimension	Day scholars MMM	Hostellers MMM	ttt	Result
Social information processing	17.29	17.17	0.36	Not significant
Social skills	19.02	18.44	1.20	Not significant
Social awareness	16.58	16.46	0.27	Not significant
Overall social intelligence	52.89	52.08	0.94	Not significant

Critical *t* value = 1.96 at the .05 level.

9. Discussion

The finding that most students possessed moderate social intelligence suggests that secondary school students in Salem district have basic interpersonal competence but may not consistently demonstrate advanced social understanding across varied situations. Moderate social intelligence may be sufficient for routine peer interaction, but students may require additional support for complex situations involving conflict, exclusion, cultural difference, or emotional distress.

The relatively weak performance in social awareness is an important finding. Social awareness involves sensitivity to the needs and difficulties of others, which is foundational for empathy, ethical behaviour, and civic participation. The low proportion of students at the high level of social awareness suggests that schools should not assume that social awareness develops automatically through ordinary classroom interaction.

The significantly higher social-skills score among female students may reflect socialization patterns that encourage girls to express concern for others, maintain relationships, and engage in cooperative behaviour. However, this interpretation should be made cautiously. Gender differences are shaped by family expectations, peer norms, school climate, and opportunities for practice rather than by innate ability. Educational interventions should therefore avoid stereotyping and instead provide all students with opportunities to develop interpersonal competence.

The significant urban advantage in social awareness may be associated with greater exposure to diverse people, institutions, and social activities. Urban students may have more opportunities to observe different social roles, participate in community events, and access information through media and technology. Nevertheless, the absence of a significant difference in overall social intelligence indicates that rural students possess comparable general social competence.

The non-significant findings for medium of instruction and accommodation are meaningful. They suggest that the language through which students are taught and whether they live at home or in a hostel do not automatically determine social intelligence. More immediate influences may include teacher–student relationships, peer-group quality, classroom participation, family communication, and opportunities for collaborative learning.

10. Educational Implications

The findings suggest that social intelligence should be treated as an intentional educational outcome rather than an incidental by-product of schooling. Schools can integrate social-

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emotional learning into regular teaching through discussion, role play, cooperative projects, peer feedback, and reflective activities.

Teachers should give particular attention to social awareness. Classroom activities can include perspective-taking exercises, community-based projects, discussions of real-life social issues, and opportunities for students to express empathy and respect for others. Such activities may help students move beyond basic social information processing toward deeper understanding of others' experiences.

Because female students scored higher in social skills, male students may benefit from structured opportunities to practice active listening, emotional expression, collaboration, and conflict resolution. These opportunities should be provided in a supportive, non-judgmental environment.

Rural students may benefit from school programmes that expand exposure to diverse social experiences, such as inter-school activities, cultural exchange, community service, and digital literacy initiatives. However, such programmes should value local knowledge and community participation rather than treating urban experience as inherently superior.

11. Recommendations

1. Schools should introduce structured social-emotional learning activities across subjects.
2. Teachers should use cooperative learning, role play, debating, group projects, and peer mentoring to strengthen social skills.
3. School counsellors should identify students with low social awareness and provide targeted support.
4. Parent–teacher meetings should include guidance on respectful communication and empathetic parenting.
5. Schools should create inclusive classroom climates where students feel safe expressing ideas and emotions.
6. Future research should examine social intelligence in relation to academic achievement, emotional intelligence, peer relationships, and mental health.
7. Intervention studies should test whether social intelligence training produces measurable improvements in students' social awareness and social skills.

12. Limitations

The study was limited to 400 Class IX students in Salem district; therefore, the findings should be generalized cautiously. Data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability and students' interpretation of items. The study also focused only on social intelligence and did not measure other related variables, such as emotional intelligence, academic achievement, or personality.

13. Conclusion

The study found that secondary school students in Salem district generally possessed a moderate level of social intelligence. Female students demonstrated significantly stronger social skills and overall social intelligence than male students, while urban students showed greater social awareness than rural students. Medium of instruction and accommodation did not significantly influence social intelligence. These findings highlight the need for deliberate school-based efforts to develop social awareness and interpersonal competence among all adolescents.

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