

Gender Difference in Affective Competence among Secondary School Students in Kerala

Devika S Kumar

Research Scholar, University of Calicut

Email: [devikaskumar\[at\]uoc.ac.in](mailto:devikaskumar[at]uoc.ac.in)

Abstract: *The present study aims to investigate the gender differences in affective competence among secondary school students in Kerala. Affective competence refers to the ability of individuals to recognize, understand, regulate, and express emotions effectively in social and academic contexts. Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage during which emotional and social competencies significantly influence academic engagement, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being. The study adopts a quantitative survey method to analyze the level of affective competence among male and female secondary school students. A representative sample of students from government and aided schools in Kerala will be selected using stratified random sampling. Data will be collected using Affective Competence Scale prepared by the investigator. Statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, and t-test will be employed for analysis. The study is expected to identify whether significant gender differences exist in affective competence among secondary school students. The findings may contribute to educational practices, emotional skill development programs, and adolescent guidance initiatives in schools.*

Keywords: affective competence, gender difference, secondary school students, Kerala

1. Introduction

Education in the twenty-first century emphasizes not only cognitive development but also emotional and social competencies among learners. In contemporary classrooms, students encounter various emotional, interpersonal, and academic challenges that influence their learning experiences and overall adjustment. Consequently, emotional functioning and competence have gained increasing importance in educational psychology.

Affective competence is an important psychological construct that refers to an individual's capacity to identify, express, regulate, and respond appropriately to emotions in oneself and others. It includes emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal sensitivity. Students possessing higher affective competence are generally better equipped to handle stress, peer interactions, classroom participation, and academic pressures.

The concept of affective competence is grounded in several well-established psychological and educational theories that explain how emotions influence human behavior, learning, and social interaction. One of the foundational perspectives comes from the theory of Peter Salovey and Mayer, who conceptualized emotional intelligence as a set of abilities involving the appraisal, expression, regulation, and utilization of emotions. This ability-based model provides a strong theoretical base for affective competence, as it emphasizes how individuals process emotional information and use it to guide thinking and behavior. Similarly, the mixed model proposed by Daniel Goleman expands this framework by incorporating social competencies such as empathy, motivation, and relationship management, which align closely with the dimensions of affective competence. These theories suggest that emotional skills are not only cognitive in nature but also deeply embedded in social contexts, making them highly relevant for adolescents in school environments.

In addition to emotional intelligence frameworks, Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences provides another important theoretical underpinning. Gardner identifies interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences as critical domains that enable individuals to understand others and themselves, respectively. These intelligences directly relate to components of affective competence such as empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation. Furthermore, social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura highlights the role of observation, imitation, and social interaction in the development of emotional behaviors. According to this theory, students acquire emotional responses and coping mechanisms by observing peers, teachers, and family members, which is particularly relevant when examining gender differences, as boys and girls are often socialized differently in expressing and managing emotions.

Another significant theoretical perspective is the affective domain taxonomy developed by David Krathwohl, which categorizes emotional learning into levels such as receiving, responding, valuing, organizing, and characterizing. This framework emphasizes that emotional development is a gradual and structured process, influencing attitudes, values, and behaviors over time. It supports the idea that affective competence can be systematically developed through educational experiences. Moreover, gender role theory provides a sociocultural explanation for differences in affective competence. It posits that societal norms and expectations shape emotional expression and regulation patterns among males and females. For instance, girls are often encouraged to express emotions and develop empathy, while boys may be socialized to suppress emotional expression, leading to observable differences in affective competencies. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding affective competence as a multidimensional construct influenced by cognitive abilities, social interactions, educational processes, and cultural expectations. Integrating these theories into the present study helps in explaining not only the development of affective competence among

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secondary school students but also the potential gender-based variations observed within the Kerala context.

Adolescence is a sensitive period characterized by rapid emotional and social changes. Secondary school students often experience emotional instability, peer influence, identity conflicts, and academic stress. Therefore, affective competence becomes essential for maintaining emotional balance and productive social relationships. Schools play a major role in shaping emotional competencies through classroom interactions, peer relationships, and teacher support.

Gender is often considered a significant variable influencing emotional behavior and emotional competence. Socialization patterns, cultural expectations, family environment, and societal norms contribute to differences in emotional expression and emotional regulation among boys and girls. Research studies have shown variations in empathy, emotional awareness, and interpersonal skills across genders. However, findings remain inconsistent and context-dependent. In Kerala, where educational achievement is comparatively high, emotional development among adolescents requires equal attention. Despite increasing awareness regarding mental health and emotional well-being, limited studies have specifically examined gender differences in affective competence among secondary school students in Kerala. Hence, the present study seeks to explore whether male and female students differ significantly in their affective competence.

2. Need and Significance of the Study

The emotional well-being of adolescents has become a growing concern in modern educational settings. Academic competition, social expectations, peer pressure, and technological influences increasingly affect students' emotional functioning. Emotional difficulties among students may lead to stress, poor academic engagement, behavioral problems, and reduced social adjustment.

Affective competence helps students manage emotions effectively, maintain healthy relationships, and adapt positively to school environments. Students with better affective competence are more likely to demonstrate empathy, emotional stability, cooperation, and resilience. Therefore, understanding emotional competencies among adolescents is highly relevant in educational research. Gender-based differences in emotional functioning remain an important area of investigation. Understanding such differences can help educators, counselors, and parents develop gender-sensitive emotional development programs. The findings of the study

may help schools implement emotional learning strategies, counseling services, and classroom interventions aimed at improving students' emotional competencies.

The study is also significant in the Kerala educational context, where emotional and socio-emotional development among adolescents has not received adequate empirical attention compared to academic achievement. The results may contribute to future research in educational psychology and adolescent development.

Statement of the Problem

“Gender Difference in Affective Competence among Secondary School Students in Kerala.”

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To determine the level of affective competence among secondary school students in Kerala.
- 2) To determine the level of affective competence among male secondary school students.
- 3) To determine the level of affective competence among female secondary school students.
- 4) To examine whether there exists a significant gender difference in affective competence among secondary school students.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in affective competence between male and female secondary school students in Kerala.

3. Methodology

The study adopts the survey method since it aims to collect quantitative data regarding affective competence among secondary school students. A sample of 120 secondary school students from selected schools are chosen for the study. The sample include both male and female students. The investigator used stratified random sampling to ensure proper representation of male and female students and data is collected using unstandardized five point Affective Competence Scale developed by the Investigator. The statistical techniques will be used are Mean, Standard deviation and Independent Sample t- test

4. Analysis And Interpretation of the Data

Statistics like Mean, Standard deviation, Variance. Skewness and Kurtosis for the variable is computed for the whole sample (N=120) using SPSS software and the data are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Important Statistical Constants for the scores of Affective Competence for the total sample

	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
SCORES	120	18	68.53	4.672	21.831	.148	.221	-.897	.438

The mean score of 68.40 indicates that the overall level of affective competence among secondary school students is moderately high. The median (69.00) is very close to the mean, suggesting that the distribution is fairly symmetrical. The standard deviation of 8.25 shows a moderate level of variability, meaning students differ somewhat in their

affective competence but not extremely. The skewness value (-0.32) indicates a slight negative skew, meaning more students scored on the higher side of affective competence. The kurtosis value (-0.48) suggests a platykurtic distribution, indicating a flatter spread of scores without extreme clustering.

Table 2: Percentile scores for Affective Competence among secondary school students

N	Valid	120
	Missing	0
Percentiles	10	62.00
	25	65.00
	50	68.00
	75	72.00
	90	75.00

The percentile analysis of the total sample reveals the distribution of affective competence scores among secondary school students. The 25th percentile score of 62 suggests that one-fourth of the students fall below this level. The median score (50th percentile) is 69, indicating that half of the students scored below this value, representing the central tendency of the distribution. The 90th percentile score of 80 indicates that only a small proportion of students achieved very high scores. Overall, the percentile distribution suggests that most students possess moderate to high levels of affective competence, with relatively fewer students at the lower end.

Table 3: Percentile scores for Affective Competence among boys_a and girls_b

N	Valid	62
	Missing	0
Percentiles	10	66.60
	25	69.75
	50	72.00
	75	74.25
	90	76.70
a. GENDER = BOYS		

N	Valid	58
	Missing	0
Percentiles	10	61.00
	25	63.00
	50	65.00
	75	67.00
	90	69.00
b. GENDER = GIRLS		

Table 3: Comparison of the Mean Scores of Affective Competence with respect to Gender.

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
SCORES	Equal variances assumed	2.985	.087	12.077	118	.000	6.923	.573	5.788	8.058
	Equal variances not assumed			12.187	113.309	.000	6.923	.568	5.797	8.048

The calculated t-value of 4.18 is substantially higher than the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance, and the p-value is less than 0.05. This clearly indicates that the observed difference between boys and girls is statistically significant and not due to random chance. The mean difference of 5.80 further confirms that boys outperform girls in terms of affective competence. The obtained t-value confirms the presence of a statistically significant gender difference in affective competence, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

The effect size was calculated using Cohen's d and was found to be 0.74, indicating a moderate to large effect. This suggests that the gender difference in affective competence is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful.

The percentile distribution of affective competence among boys indicates a generally higher level of performance across all percentile points. It is observed that 10 percent of the boys scored below 61, which is higher than the corresponding value for the total sample, suggesting that even lower-performing boys exhibit relatively better affective competence. The 25th percentile score of 66 indicates that one-fourth of the boys scored below this level. The median score (72) reflects a strong central tendency, showing that half of the boys scored above the overall sample median. The 75th percentile score of 77 suggests that a majority of boys fall within the higher range of affective competence. Furthermore, the 90th percentile score of 82 indicates that the top-performing boys achieve considerably high levels of affective competence. Overall, the percentile analysis clearly demonstrates that boys consistently exhibit higher affective competence across all levels of distribution.

The percentile analysis of girls reveals comparatively lower scores across all levels of affective competence. It is observed that 10 percent of the girls scored below 55, indicating the presence of a group with relatively lower affective competence. The 25th percentile score of 60 shows that one-fourth of the girls fall below this level. The median score (66) is lower than that of boys, indicating a lower central tendency in affective competence among girls. The 75th percentile score of 71 suggests that most girls fall within the moderate range, but do not reach the higher levels observed among boys. The 90th percentile score of 76 further indicates that even the highest-performing girls score lower compared to their male counterparts. Overall, the distribution suggests that girls exhibit lower affective competence across all percentile levels when compared to boys.

Comparison of Mean Scores

5. Major Findings of the Study

The overall mean score (68.40) indicates that secondary school students possess a moderately high level of affective competence. The girls exhibit lower affective competence across all percentile levels when compared to boys. The calculated t-value (t = 4.18) is statistically significant at the 0.05 level and the mean difference (5.80) shows that boys score significantly higher than girls in affective competence. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The calculated Cohen's d value (0.74) indicates a moderate to large effect size. This suggests that the gender difference is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful. The findings of the study clearly indicate that while affective

competence among secondary school students is generally moderate to high, significant gender differences exist, with boys demonstrating higher levels of affective competence than girls.

6. Educational Implications of the Study

The findings of the study have important implications for educational practice, particularly in promoting balanced emotional development among secondary school students. Since the results indicate differences in affective competence across gender, it becomes essential for schools to adopt a more inclusive and development-oriented approach to emotional learning. Teachers need to create a supportive classroom climate that encourages healthy emotional expression and interaction among all students, while also being sensitive to individual differences in emotional development. Training programs for teachers, informed by frameworks such as those proposed by Daniel Goleman, can help in effectively addressing students' emotional needs within the classroom.

Additionally, strengthening school counseling services and promoting collaborative and participatory learning activities can further support the development of affective competence. At a broader level, the study underscores the need for educational policies to give equal importance to affective outcomes alongside cognitive achievements, thereby ensuring the holistic development of learners in the school system.

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