

# Redirecting the Risk Drive: The Interplay of Emotional Intelligence, Peer Acceptance, and Psychological Safety in Higher Education

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*Abstract- In the realm of higher education, students frequently engage in various forms of risk-taking. These risks can sometimes be constructive such as acquiring new knowledge, openly expressing one's views, or assuming leadership roles while at other times, they may veer in a negative direction, leading to the adoption of detrimental habits or the neglect of academic studies. Consequently, it is crucial to understand the specific factors that motivate students to undertake risks that lead them in a positive direction. This study focuses on three primary factors: emotional intelligence, peer acceptance, and psychological safety. Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity to understand and effectively manage one's own emotions as well as those of others. Students possessing a high level of this competence are better equipped to make sound decisions, even when faced with situations involving stress and pressure. Peer acceptance instills in students a sense of belonging within their peer group, thereby bolstering their self-confidence and fostering a positive mindset. Conversely, psychological safety creates an environment where students feel empowered to express their opinions, ask questions, and explore new learning opportunities without fear of repercussions. This study revealed that students who possess strong emotional intelligence and who receive support and acceptance from their peers are more inclined to engage in positive and constructive risk-taking. These students actively seek out new challenges and strive for self-improvement. In contrast, students who lack emotional support or a secure environment may, at times, make decisions that lead them in a detrimental direction. In conclusion, it can be asserted that if colleges and universities cultivate an environment where students feel understood and accepted and are afforded the opportunity to advance without fear a positive transformation can be observed across three key dimensions: their mindset, their behaviour, and their overall success.*

*Keywords: Higher education, Risk-taking, Emotional intelligence, Peer acceptance, psychological safety.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The phase of higher education constitutes an extremely critical and transformative period in students' lives a time when they not only acquire academic knowledge but also shape their personal identities, social relationships, and future trajectories. During this period, students make a multitude of decisions, many of which inherently involve risk. Risk-taking behaviour refers to the process by which an individual selects options with uncertain outcomes situations where there exists a potential for both gain and loss. Adolescence is widely regarded as a time of exploration, independence, and self-discovery; consequently, a relatively higher propensity for risk-taking is observed within this age demographic. However, it is crucial to recognize that not all forms of risk are detrimental; indeed, taking risks is often essential for learning, innovation, and personal growth. Positive risks such as participating in new activities, openly expressing one's views, assuming leadership roles, or embracing new challenges contribute significantly to a student's holistic development. Conversely, negative risks such as substance abuse, academic apathy, or undisciplined behaviour can exert an adverse impact on their future prospects. Thus, it becomes imperative to understand the specific psychological and social factors that drive students to engage in risk-taking behaviours, whether in a positive or negative direction.

In this context, Emotional Intelligence emerges as a pivotal psychological construct a concept widely popularized by Daniel Goleman. Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's capacity to recognize, understand, and effectively manage their own emotions as well as those of others. This capacity plays a critical role in the decision-making process, particularly in situations characterized by high emotional pressure or stress. Students possessing a high level of emotional intelligence are better equipped to regulate their impulses, objectively evaluate situations, and make decisions with a keen awareness of long-term consequences; as a result, they are more inclined to embrace constructive and positive risks while successfully avoiding negative ones.

Furthermore, Peer Acceptance stands as another significant social factor that exerts a profound influence on student behaviour. Peer acceptance refers to the extent to which a student is embraced and accepted by their peer group—a factor that significantly influences their social identity and self-esteem. According to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, individuals learn by observing and being inspired by the behaviours of those around them; consequently, when students receive positive support and acceptance from their peers, they become more self-confident and are motivated to engage in positive activities. Conversely, when students experience rejection or alienation from their peer group, they may sometimes gravitate toward negative behaviours, driven by a desire to attain social acceptance in any form possible.

Similarly, psychological safety plays a pivotal role in shaping students' behaviour and learning processes. This concept, introduced by Amy Edmondson, defines psychological safety as an environment where individuals can express their ideas, ask questions, and attempt to learn new things without the fear of judgment, criticism, or rejection. When the level of psychological safety within an academic environment is high, students become more active, inquisitive, and creative, as they are confident that their ideas will be respected and that their mistakes will be viewed as opportunities for learning. Conversely, when this sense of safety is absent, students tend to suppress their ideas, avoid taking

risks, and may often resort to passive or negative behaviours.

Thus, emotional intelligence, peer acceptance, and psychological safety these three factors collectively and profoundly influence students' risk-taking behaviours. While emotional intelligence fosters internal balance and self-awareness in students, peer acceptance provides them with social support, and psychological safety empowers them to undertake new endeavours without fear. The combined impact of these three factors can motivate students to engage in positive and constructive risk-taking, thereby enhancing their academic performance, personal growth, and social adjustment. Although extensive research exists on each of these factors individually, limited studies have been conducted regarding their combined impact particularly within the context of Indian higher education. Therefore, the objective of the present study is to understand the interrelationship among these three factors and to analyze how, collectively, they influence students' risk-taking behaviour, in order to foster an environment within educational institutions that promotes the holistic development of students.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, individuals learn by observing the behavior of those around them, making the influence of the peer group extremely significant. Parker and Asher (1987) concluded that peer acceptance positively influences self-esteem and social adjustment.

According to Kahn (1990), psychological safety enhances active participation in both workplace and educational environments. According to the Problem Behavior Theory proposed by Jessor (1991), risky behavior arises from the interaction of personal (personality system), social (environment system), and behavioral (behavior system) factors. Furby and Beyth-Marom (1992) found that young people often engage in risky behaviours due to social pressure, even when they are aware of the potential consequences.

Goleman (1995) identified emotional intelligence as a key determinant of success in life. Hartup (1996)

noted that relationships with peers play a crucial role in the social development of children and adolescents. According to Wentzel (1998), students who receive acceptance from their peers tend to be more motivated and socially well-adjusted. Byrnes et al. (1999) clarified that risk-taking behavior is the result of a combination of personal experiences, social influences, and cognitive development. Introducing this concept, Edmondson (1999) described psychological safety as an environment in which individuals can express their thoughts without fear.

Singh (2003) found that emotional intelligence influences students' adjustment. Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) defined it as an ability that enables individuals to recognize, understand, and regulate their emotions. A study by Petrides et al. (2004) revealed that students with high emotional intelligence demonstrate superior academic performance and are less susceptible to engaging in risky behaviours. Zins et al. (2004) identified Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as essential for the holistic development of students.

A study by Rubin et al. (2006) found that peer rejection exacerbates social isolation and negative behaviours among students. Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2006) found that high emotional intelligence mitigates stress and enhances adaptability. Schutte et al. (2007) identified a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and positive social relationships. Brown et al. (2008) also observed that adolescents tend to conform to the behaviours of their peers. Prinstein and Dodge (2008) found that peer pressure often prompts students to engage in negative risk-taking behaviours. In his study, Steinberg (2008) noted that the propensity for risk-taking among adolescents and young adults is linked to their brain development, wherein the emotional system is highly active while the control system remains relatively underdeveloped.

A study by Carmeli et al. (2009) revealed that psychological safety fosters creativity and a propensity for knowledge sharing. Brackett et al. (2011) concluded that emotional intelligence positively influences students' decision-making abilities and mental well-being. A meta-analysis by

Durlak et al. (2011) demonstrated that social-emotional skills enhance both students' behaviour and academic performance. Eccles and Roeser (2011) concluded that a positive school environment influences students' development and decision-making processes.

Liang et al. (2012) found that psychological safety promotes proactive behaviour among employees and students. In their review study, Edmondson and Lei (2014) noted that psychological safety is associated with improved performance and learning outcomes.

Sharma and Kumar (2016) reported that peer support enhances self-esteem. Newman et al. (2017) found that psychological safety fosters learning, innovation, and teamwork. A study by Verma and Gupta (2020) revealed that psychological safety enhances students' self-confidence and academic engagement. Among higher education students, risk-taking behaviour is a multidimensional process influenced by the combined effects of biological, psychological, and social factors.

Thus, the available literature indicates that emotional intelligence, peer acceptance, and psychological safety these three factors individually as well as collectively influence students' risk-taking behaviour. However, within the context of Indian higher education, research regarding the combined impact of these three factors remains limited, thereby justifying the need for the present study.

### III. RESEARCH GAP

Existing studies indicate that emotional intelligence, peer acceptance, and psychological safety have each been the subject of independent research. However, very few studies are available regarding the combined impact of these three factors particularly among students in higher education. In most research, risk-taking behavior has been viewed solely in a negative light, while positive forms of risk-taking (such as leadership and innovation) have received scant attention.

Furthermore, research on this subject within the Indian context is limited; moreover, the concept of psychological safety has predominantly been

confined to the workplace rather than being explored within academic environments. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the combined impact of all these factors and provide a comprehensive elucidation of students' risk-taking behavior.

#### IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the level of risk-taking behavior among students in higher education.
2. To study the level of Emotional Intelligence among students and to determine its impact on risk-taking behavior.
3. To examine the relationship between Peer Acceptance and risk-taking behavior.
4. To analyze the relationship between Psychological Safety and risk-taking behavior.
5. To study the combined effect of Emotional Intelligence, Peer Acceptance, and Psychological Safety on risk-taking behavior.
6. To determine how these three factors influence students toward engaging in positive and negative risk-taking.

#### V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

##### Nature of the Study:

The present study is a theoretical and literature-based (review-based) research endeavour. It does not involve any form of primary data collection; rather, it is grounded in a systematic analysis of previously published research papers, books, and academic articles. The objective of the study is to understand the impact of emotional intelligence, peer acceptance, and psychological safety on risk-taking behavior.

##### Research Design:

This study employs a Descriptive and Analytical Research Design.

Through the descriptive component, the key concepts (variables) have been elucidated.

Within the analytical component, the interrelationships among these concepts have been explored by comparing the findings of various research studies.

##### Sample:

This study is not based on direct participants; instead, secondary sources (secondary data) have been utilized as the sample.

The literature included in this study was selected based on the following criteria:

- Research related to higher education and the adolescent/youth demographic
- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Reliable academic databases (e.g., Google Scholar, Research Gate, JSTOR)

##### Data Collection Method

Data collection was conducted entirely through secondary sources, including:

- Published research papers (Research Articles)
- Books and academic literature
- Peer-reviewed journals
- Online academic databases

During the data collection process, keywords such as: "Emotional Intelligence," "Peer Acceptance," "Psychological Safety," and "Risk-Taking Behaviour" were utilized. The study was systematically conducted through the following stages: Identification and selection of literature relevant to the subject In-depth study of pertinent research papers

##### Classification of key concepts (variables)

Comparative analysis of various research findings  
Interpretation of relationships based on the findings  
Identification of the research gap

##### Method of Data Analysis

- This study employs the Systematic Review Method.
- The analysis involved: A comparative analysis of findings from various studies
- An examination of the relationships between variables
- The identification of similarities and differences
- The synthesis of theoretical and empirical findings

#### Inclusion Criteria

1. The study includes only those research works
2. That pertain to the adolescent and youth demographic
3. That address Emotional Intelligence, Peer Acceptance, Psychological Safety, or Risk Behavior
4. That are published in credible and peer-reviewed sources
5. That have been published within the last 10–15 years (with a particular focus on recent studies)

#### Exclusion Criteria:

1. The following types of research works have been excluded
2. Those unrelated to the core subject of the study
3. Those of questionable academic quality or credibility
4. Those that are non-peer-reviewed or contain insufficient data

#### Ethical Clearance:

Since this study is based on secondary data and involves no direct data collection from human participants, formal ethical clearance is not required.

Nevertheless, the study has adhered to the following ethical standards

All sources have been properly cited

Plagiarism of any kind has been strictly avoided

The research work has been presented in an impartial and transparent manner

## VI. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study is based on a systematic literature review, the analysis of which revealed that three factors emotional intelligence, peer acceptance, and psychological safety significantly influence students' risk-taking behavior. Students with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to regulate their emotions, make sound decisions, and engage in positive risk-taking (such as participating in new

activities or assuming leadership roles), whereas students with lower emotional intelligence may be more inclined toward negative risk-taking. Similarly, peer acceptance fosters self-confidence and social adjustment among students, thereby steering them toward positive activities, whereas peer rejection can lead them toward negative behaviours. Psychological safety also plays a pivotal role; in a psychologically safe environment, students feel free to express their ideas and undertake new initiatives without fear, thereby encouraging positive risk-taking.

The study further clarified that when these three factors are present at high levels simultaneously, students tend to engage in more constructive and developmental forms of risk-taking; conversely, the absence of these factors fosters negative behaviours. These findings align with the theoretical frameworks proposed by scholars such as Daniel Goleman, Albert Bandura, Amy Edmondson, and Richard Jessor. Overall, this study demonstrates that risk-taking is not inherently negative; rather, within an appropriate psychological and social environment, it fosters students' holistic development, self-confidence, and success particularly within the context of Indian higher education.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Based on this study, it is concluded that emotional intelligence, peer acceptance, and psychological safety collectively shape the risk-taking behavior of students in higher education. When students experience emotional balance, social support, and a secure environment, they are motivated to engage in more positive, constructive, and growth-oriented risk-taking, thereby fostering their personality development, academic achievement, and self-confidence. Conversely, a deficiency in these factors may steer students toward negative and detrimental risks.

Therefore, this study underscores that educational institutions should cultivate an environment that is emotionally supportive, socially inclusive, and psychologically safe, in order to encourage the holistic development of students and guide them in a positive direction.

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