



# Emotional intelligence: The missing piece in modern education

**Updated on: Nov 27, 2025 7:00 PM IST**  
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This article explores the necessity of integrating emotional intelligence into education, emphasising the importance of skills like empathy, resilience, and social awareness to prepare students for life's challenges beyond just academics.

**Academic achievement alone can't define success. Schools must integrate emotional, social, and adversity skills into education.**

Walk into any classroom today and you'll find students excelling in academics, balancing extracurriculars, and meeting every benchmark of success. Yet behind those achievements lies a growing undercurrent of anxiety, stress, and emotional fatigue. The World Health Organisation's 2025 report revealed that one in seven adolescents aged 10 to 19 experiences a mental disorder, a reminder that while schools are preparing students for exams, they may not be preparing them for life. This brings us to an essential question: is academic achievement alone enough to define success?

## **Pillars of Holistic Intelligence**

For generations, the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) reigned supreme, held up by the education system as the single measure of a person's ability. Then came the necessary recognition of Emotional Quotient (EQ), finally forcing educators to acknowledge the essential human components: self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. Now, navigating an increasingly chaotic and unpredictable world requires two more vital skills to round out our toolkit: The Social Quotient (SQ) and the Adversity Quotient (AQ). Together, these four elements aren't just buzzwords; they're the new foundation for a truly holistic intelligence.

EQ is the inner compass, it helps individuals read their own feelings and keep their impulses in check. SQ is about facing outward, mastering the capacity to build relationships, communicate effectively, and collaborate smoothly. But it's the

Adversity Quotient (AQ) that feels most critical right now. AQ is the sheer gutsy ability to take life's inevitable punches, endure massive challenges, and bounce back stronger.

Look at the crises unfolding today, particularly the tragic rise in student suicides, and you see a glaring hole in AQ. Too many young people are completely blindsided by failure, rejection, or major life changes. It's not a lack of academic smarts holding them back; it's a terrifying shortage of the emotional and psychological tools needed to simply process difficulty.

However, holistic intelligence is not limited to these four pillars. In modern education, two new dimensions are rapidly gaining prominence: Digital Quotient (DQ)—the ability to use technology responsibly, creatively, and safely—and Learning Quotient (LQ)—the capacity to learn, unlearn, and relearn in a constantly changing world.

### **Life Skills Aren't Optional**

Education has to pivot. It must move past the textbook and deliberately arm students with these life skills from the very start. Emotional, social, and adversity quotients aren't soft skills, they are foundational survival skills that dictate how children think, interact, and respond to the world around them.

The evidence is clear: The UNICEF 2017 report pointed to childhood and adolescence as pivotal periods for emotional development, noting that neural changes in these years fundamentally shape our ability to handle future stress. Similarly, Epstein's 1986 research showed significant brain growth peaks around ages seven, twelve, and fifteen, exactly when kids should be actively learning to manage emotions, work with others, and build resilience.

Yet, our current model is still stubbornly fixated on grades and performance metrics. We teach kids to solve complex equations but leave them clueless about how to solve a conflict; we prepare them to win a trophy but not how to cope with a gut-wrenching loss. This widening gulf between intellectual and emotional education comes at a steep price: our most academically gifted students are often the ones silently struggling with burnout, stress, and crushing anxiety.

### **Building a Collective Resilience**

To narrow this gap, schools must stop treating emotional intelligence as an optional extra and start weaving it into the very fabric of the curriculum. Different ages need different approaches. For the littlest ones, play-based learning is crucial, letting children naturally identify, express, and negotiate their emotions in a low-pressure setting. For older students, the focus shifts to experiential and project-based learning, using structured activities to foster practical skills like teamwork, empathy, and deep self-reflection.

A comprehensive, Socio-Emotional Mindfulness Learning (SEML) curriculum, running from nursery through high school, guarantees that students aren't just labeling feelings but are actively mastering conflict resolution, positive relationship building, and self-management. They're just as essential as math or science because they equip kids to navigate life's inevitable complications with grace and balance. Additionally, importance of wellbeing classes for adolescence — focusing on personal boundaries, safety, and addressing sexuality and gender-related concerns. This supports them to be emotionally more mature and equipped to handle the challenges of growing up.

Crucially, emotional education can't be limited to the children. Teachers and parents are the emotional bedrock of a child's life. When educators and caregivers feel emotionally supported and aware, they naturally create safer, more empathetic environments. A genuinely holistic approach requires everyone — students, teachers, support staff and parents to work together, collectively nurturing stability and resilience.

Around the globe, institutions are wisely adopting proactive strategies like the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). This framework provides layered well-being support: universal strategies for every student, targeted help for those showing early signs of distress, and intensive care for those who need sustained assistance. It's a game-changing model that prioritises prevention, minimises the stigma around seeking help, and seamlessly integrates emotional care into the school's daily life. It's the necessary shift from reacting to a crisis to proactively building a resilient community.

As educators and policymakers, we need to stop and fundamentally redefine what a truly educated person looks like. Teaching empathy, resilience, and self-regulation isn't a nice-to-have; it is the core mandate for preparing young people for the world that awaits them. If schools can empower children to understand themselves and others, to cope with setbacks, and to build meaningful connections, we won't just be nurturing achievers, we'll be cultivating balanced, compassionate individuals capable of leading with both their head and their heart.

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**Published by:**

**Hindustan Times** 

**INTERNATIONAL PRIMARY CAMPUS**, DLF Phase 5, Gurugram.

**INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE AND SENIOR CAMPUS**, Heritage Avenue, Near Sector 58, Gurugram.

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