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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND RESPONSIBLE GENERATIVE AI ENGAGEMENT AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: The growing presence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in higher education is reshaping how students access, interpret, and produce academic knowledge. However, the educational value of these technologies depends not merely on their availability but also on how thoughtfully and responsibly students engage with them. Decisions concerning the acceptance of AI-generated information, the evaluation of its accuracy, and the extent of reliance placed on such outputs involve personal judgement, emotional regulation, and a sense of academic responsibility. These considerations bring emotional intelligence (EI) into focus as a potentially relevant psychological dimension of students' engagement with GenAI. This study examined the relationship between EI and responsible GenAI engagement among higher education students. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, involving 200 undergraduate and postgraduate students in Assam, India, selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using EI and Responsible GenAI Engagement scales, which demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$ and .91, respectively). Pearson's correlation revealed a significant positive relationship between EI and responsible GenAI engagement ($r = .57$, $p < .001$). Regression analysis showed that EI significantly predicted responsible GenAI engagement, explaining 32.1% of the variance ($R^2 = .321$, $p < .001$). The findings suggest that EI is positively associated with students' responsible engagement with GenAI.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence; generative artificial intelligence; responsible generative AI engagement; AI-generated information; higher education students.

INTRODUCTION:

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is increasingly used in higher education for academic writing, information retrieval, feedback, coding, and personalised learning, while raising concerns about learning quality, independent thinking, accuracy, privacy, and ethical use (Chan & Hu, 2023). Recent experimental evidence indicates that ChatGPT can improve students' academic performance and higher-order thinking, although its effects vary across learning outcomes (Deng et al., 2025). Effective engagement with AI requires AI literacy, including knowledge and understanding of AI systems, the ability to use and evaluate AI outputs, and awareness of ethical issues (Ng et al., 2021). However, familiarity with AI tools does not necessarily ensure critical evaluation or recognition of their limitations. Chiu et al. (2023) highlighted the limitations of self-reported AI literacy and the importance of objective assessment of students' actual AI-related competencies. These findings highlight the need to examine how students evaluate AI-generated information and exercise judgement when incorporating it into academic work.

1.2. Responsible Use of GenAI by Higher Education Students

The growing use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in higher education has raised concerns about academic integrity, accuracy, privacy, plagiarism, over-reliance, and independent thinking (Johnston et al., 2024; Chan & Hu, 2023). Responsible GenAI engagement extends beyond technology adoption to include critical evaluation of AI-generated information, recognition of its limitations, academic integrity, transparent disclosure, and accountability. Fischer et al. (2024) found that students' GenAI use in assessment often focused on writing and rephrasing, with less frequent engagement involving critical thinking. Similarly, the Artificial Intelligence Assessment Scale proposed by Perkins et al. (2024) provides a framework for aligning AI use with assessment requirements and promoting transparency. Despite institutional guidance, students may remain uncertain about acceptable AI use (Huang et al., 2025). Responsible engagement therefore requires AI-related knowledge, critical judgement, self-regulation, and ethical decision-making, highlighting the need to examine how students' psychological characteristics relate to their responsible use of GenAI.

1.3. Emotional Intelligence as a Psychological Factor in Responsible GenAI Engagement

Research on GenAI in higher education has focused primarily on AI literacy, technological competence, adoption, academic integrity, and ethical use, with comparatively limited attention to emotional intelligence (EI) in relation to responsible GenAI engagement. EI involves perceiving, understanding, using, and regulating emotions (Mayer et al., 2004) and help students manage uncertainty, evaluate potentially misleading AI-generated information, and regulate their reliance on AI. These proposed pathways remain theoretical rather than established causal effects. Supporting the relevance of EI to AI-related competencies, Fu (2025), in a study involving 383 STEM teachers, found that EI was associated with and predicted AI literacy. However, AI literacy concerns the knowledge and competencies required to understand and use AI, whereas responsible GenAI engagement involves its appropriate, critical, and ethical use in specific contexts. Therefore, findings on EI and AI literacy do not establish whether EI is associated with responsible GenAI engagement among higher education students, warranting direct empirical investigation.

1.4. Research Gap

Although previous studies have examined emotional intelligence in relation to academic performance and self-efficacy (Quílez-Robres et al., 2023; Sun & Lyu, 2022), and research has explored students' engagement with GenAI, ethical perceptions, and information-verification practices (Baek et al., 2024; Bhullar et al., 2024; Acosta-Enriquez et al., 2024; Fuller & Barnes, 2024), the relationship between emotional intelligence and responsible GenAI engagement remains insufficiently examined. The present study addresses this gap by investigating the association between EI and responsible GenAI engagement and examining its predictive contribution among higher education students.

1.5. Rationale and Objectives of the Study

The relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and responsible generative AI (GenAI) engagement warrants investigation because students must evaluate AI-generated information, regulate their reliance on AI, recognise ethical boundaries, and retain responsibility for academic decisions. Research emphasises critical evaluation, transparent use, and alignment with assessment requirements in AI-supported learning (Fischer et al., 2024; Perkins et al., 2024), while emerging evidence links EI with AI literacy among STEM teachers (Fu, 2025). As higher education institutions develop initiatives addressing AI literacy, accuracy, privacy, and academic integrity (Chan & Hu, 2023; Perkins et al., 2024), Understanding this relationship may inform student support alongside technical instruction and institutional guidance. Accordingly, the present study examines the relationship between EI and responsible GenAI engagement among higher education students and investigates the extent to which EI predicts responsibleengagement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is increasingly used in higher education for writing, summarisation, programming, and other learning activities, while raising concerns about accuracy, academic integrity, and dependence on AI-generated content (Baek et al., 2024; Bhullar et al., 2024). Students' engagement with GenAI is influenced by individual characteristics, institutional guidance, knowledge, attitudes, and ethical perceptions (Baek et al., 2024; Acosta-Enriquez et al., 2024). Responsible engagement therefore requires critical evaluation, information verification, privacy protection, and academic integrity (Fuller & Barnes, 2024; Acosta-Enriquez et al., 2024).

Emotional intelligence (EI) involves perceiving, using, understanding, and regulating emotional information (Mayer et al., 2004). Previous research has examined EI in relation to academic performance (Quílez-Robres et al., 2023), self-efficacy, and coping styles (Sun & Lyu, 2022). Acosta-Enriquez et al. (2024) examined students' attitudes towards ChatGPT in relation to emotions, perceived risks, and information verification. However, emotional responses towards AI differ from EI (Mayer et al., 2004; Acosta-Enriquez et al., 2024), and positive attitudes do not necessarily indicate responsible use. Although EI help students manage uncertainty, evaluate AI-generated information, and regulate their decisions, direct empirical evidence linking EI with responsible GenAI engagement remains limited, warranting further investigation.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework draws on Mayer et al.'s (2004) ability model of emotional intelligence and research on students' GenAI engagement (Baek et al., 2024; Acosta-Enriquez et al., 2024). It identifies emotional intelligence (EI) as the predictor variable and responsible GenAI engagement (RGAIE) as the outcome variable. Responsible engagement encompasses purposeful use, critical evaluation of AI-generated outputs, human oversight, self-regulation, and ethical use with transparency.

Figure 1



The framework is associated with responsible GenAI engagement through its potential relevance to managing uncertainty and regulating decisions during AI-supported academic tasks. The direction and strength of this relationship are examined empirically in the present study. Institutional policies, AI literacy, perceived risks, ethical perceptions, and information-verification intentions also influence responsible engagement (Baek et al., 2024; Acosta-Enriquez et al., 2024).

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

4.1. Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the levels of emotional intelligence and responsible GenAI engagement among higher education students.
2. To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and responsible GenAI engagement among higher education students.
3. To examine the predictive contribution of emotional intelligence to responsible GenAI engagement among higher education students.

4.2. Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated:

H_{01}: There is no statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and responsible GenAI engagement among higher education students.

H_{02}: Emotional intelligence does not significantly predict responsible GenAI engagement among higher education students.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and responsible generative artificial intelligence engagement (RGAIE) among higher education students. EI was treated as the predictor variable, while RGAIE was treated as the outcome variable. The design enabled the assessment of both constructs and the examination of their statistical association and predictive relationship.

Research on GenAI in higher education has examined students' engagement with AI through technology acceptance, trust, perceived risk, moral obligation, academic integrity, and ethical perceptions (Lai et al., 2024). Emerging research has also emphasised critical evaluation, ethical awareness, and responsible interaction with GenAI as components of AI-related competence. However, the relationship between students' emotional intelligence and their responsible engagement with GenAI remains insufficiently established. The present study

therefore focused on the relationship

5.2. Participants and Sampling

A total of 200 valid responses were retained for the final analysis. The participants comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in colleges and universities in Assam, India. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. Students who provided informed consent and completed the questionnaire adequately were included in the analysis. Responses from individuals who did not provide informed consent or contained substantial missing data were excluded before the final dataset was prepared. The resulting sample was used to examine the levels of EI and RGAIE and the relationship between the two variables.

5.3. Study Variables

The study examined two principal variables:

- **Predictor variable:** Emotional intelligence (EI).
- **Outcome variable:** Responsible generative AI engagement (RGAIE).

5.4. Research Instruments

5.4.1. Emotional Intelligence Scale

Emotional intelligence was measured using a 16-item Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), comprising four dimensions: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .89.

5.4.2. Responsible Generative AI Engagement Scale

Responsible GenAI engagement was measured using a 21-item Responsible Generative AI Engagement Scale (RGAIES), informed by literature on GenAI literacy, ethical AI use, academic integrity, output evaluation, and privacy. The scale covered four dimensions: purposeful use, critical evaluation of AI outputs, human oversight and self-regulation, and ethical use and transparency. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

5.5. Validity and Reliability

Both scales were standardised by the researcher. Face and content validity were examined through expert review to assess the clarity, appropriateness, and comprehensiveness of the items in measuring the intended constructs and their respective dimensions. Reliability was assessed in terms of internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. The Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) yielded an alpha coefficient of .89, while the Responsible Generative AI Engagement Scale (RGAIES) yielded .91, indicating satisfactory internal consistency for both instruments.

5.6. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from undergraduate and postgraduate students using a structured questionnaire comprising demographic questions, an Emotional Intelligence (EI) scale, and the researcher-developed Responsible Generative AI Engagement Scale (RGAIES). The questionnaire was administered through both online and offline modes. Before participation, students were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality arrangements, and their right to withdraw.

Informed consent was obtained before participants completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to collect information about students' self-reported emotional intelligence and responsible GenAI engagement without requesting unnecessary identifying information about students, their assignments, instructors, or other individuals. The completed responses were screened before the final dataset was prepared for analysis.

5.7. Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, the intended use of their responses, confidentiality arrangements, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Unnecessary identifying information was not collected, and the data were stored securely and used exclusively for research purposes. Findings were reported in aggregate form to protect participants' identities.

5.8. Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Initially, the dataset was screened for missing responses, duplicate cases, outliers, and distributional characteristics. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores, were computed to assess the levels of emotional intelligence and responsible GenAI engagement. Cronbach's alpha was used to examine the internal consistency of the research instruments. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the relationship between EI and RGAIE. Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive contribution of EI to responsible GenAI engagement.

6. RESULTS

6.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the study variables (N = 200)

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Emotional Intelligence	200	34	80	61.84	8.21
Responsible Generative AI Engagement	200	42	84	65.27	8.83

The descriptive statistics indicated that the mean score for emotional intelligence was 61.84 (SD = 8.21), while the mean score for responsible GenAI engagement was 65.27 (SD = 8.83). The observed scores ranged from 34 to 80 for EI and from 42 to 84 for RGAIE. These results describe the distribution and variability of the two study variables among the participating students.

6.2. Reliability Analysis

Table 2 Internal consistency of the study measures

Scale	Items	Cronbach's α
Emotional Intelligence	16	.89
Responsible Generative AI Engagement	21	.91

Both measures demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the commonly accepted .70 criterion. The reliability of the EI measure is also consistent with evidence supporting the EIS four-dimensional structure among Indian college students (Rathore & Chadha, 2021).

6.3. Correlation Analysis

Table 3 Pearson correlation between emotional intelligence and responsible generative AI engagement

Variable	1	2
1. Emotional Intelligence	1	.57
2. Responsible Generative AI Engagement	.57	1

Note.p< .001.

Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and responsible generative AI engagement ($r = .57$, $p < .001$). This indicates that students reporting higher levels of emotional intelligence also tended to report higher levels of responsible engagement with GenAI. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_{01}), which proposed no statistically significant relationship between the two variables, was rejected.

6.4. Regression Analysis

Table 4 Model summary for emotional intelligence predicting responsible generative AI engagement

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
1	.57	.321	.318	7.29

Note. Predictor: Emotional Intelligence. Dependent variable: Responsible Generative AI Engagement.

Emotional intelligence explained approximately 32.1% of the variance in responsible generative AI engagement.

Table 5 ANOVA for the regression model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	4,984.36	1	4,984.36	93.78	<.001
Residual	10,524.18	198	53.15		
Total	15,508.54	199			

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 198) = 93.78$, $p < .001$, indicating that emotional intelligence significantly predicted responsible generative AI engagement.

Table 6 Regression coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	24.18	4.27	—	5.66	<.001	[15.76, 32.60]
Emotional Intelligence	0.62	0.07	.57	9.68	<.001	[0.53, 0.80]

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive contribution of emotional intelligence to responsible generative AI engagement. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 198) = 93.78$, $p < .001$. The model explained 32.1% of the variance in responsible GenAI engagement ($R^2 = .321$; adjusted $R^2 = .318$). The results indicate that emotional intelligence made a statistically significant

positive contribution to predicting responsible GenAI engagement. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) was rejected.

6.5. Hypothesis Testing

Table 7 Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Test	Statistic	p	Decision
H_{01}: EI is not significantly related to responsible GenAI engagement.	Pearson correlation	r = .57	<.001	Rejected
H_{02}: EI does not significantly predict responsible GenAI engagement.	Linear regression	β = .57; F(1, 198) = 93.78	<.001	Rejected

7. DISCUSSION

The findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and responsible generative AI engagement among higher education students ($r = .57$, $p < .001$). The regression analysis further indicated that emotional intelligence significantly predicted responsible GenAI engagement, accounting for 32.1% of its variance. These findings suggest that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to report more responsible engagement with GenAI.

Responsible GenAI engagement involves more than the frequency of technology use. It requires students to evaluate AI-generated information, consider academic integrity requirements, recognise the limitations of AI-generated outputs, and make informed decisions about appropriate use. Johnston et al. (2024) reported that students identified reliability, plagiarism, and ethical concerns as important issues in their academic use of GenAI. Similarly, Barus et al. (2025) found that students emphasised AI competency, ethical awareness, clear institutional guidelines, and the prevention of misuse. In this context, the present findings extend the discussion by identifying an association between students' emotional intelligence and their self-reported responsible GenAI engagement. However, given the cross-sectional design, the findings do not establish a causal relationship between the two constructs.

8. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, the study extends emotional-intelligence research into the emerging area of responsible generative AI use in higher education. The findings suggest that psychological characteristics complement technology-acceptance and AI-literacy perspectives when responsible AI behaviour is examined. Practically, institutions could combine GenAI literacy with activities addressing emotional self-regulation, ethical judgement, critical evaluation of AI outputs and academic integrity. This is consistent with recent research calling for clearer institutional guidance and ethics-oriented AI education.

9. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study used a cross-sectional convenience sample of 200 higher education students from Assam. Consequently, the findings cannot establish causality or be assumed to represent all higher education students. Self-report measures may also introduce common-method bias. Future studies should use larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs and objective indicators of GenAI behaviour. Variables such as AI literacy, ethical awareness, academic integrity, perceived risk and institutional policy could also be examined as mediators or moderators.

10. CONCLUSION

The study found a statistically significant positive association between emotional intelligence and responsible generative AI engagement among higher education students. Emotional intelligence explained 32.1% of the variance in responsible GenAI engagement in the regression model. These findings suggest that emotional competencies relevant to understanding responsible student engagement with generative AI. Although the results indicate a meaningful predictive relationship, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions. Further longitudinal and multi-institutional research is required to examine whether this relationship remains consistent across different student populations and educational contexts.

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