

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Predicting Academic Success and Stress Management Among University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and academic success, as well as its impact on stress management among university students in Pakistan. The objective of this research was to determine whether students who have a higher EI level will also have better academic success and stress management skills compared to those having a low EI level.

Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted among 207 students of the university in Pakistan between August and September 2024 through purposeful sampling. All participants were above 18 years of age. Informed consent was taken before involving them in the research. There was a standardized assessment of emotional Intelligence, Perceived Stress, and academic Stress using the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), and the Academic Stress Scale. Data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics v26. IBM Corp., Armonk, NY) employing descriptive statistics and chi-square tests.

Results

The study found no significant relationship between EI with performance in academics. The association was meaningful, however. Though students reported mild levels of Stress, EI was not significantly associated with how students managed their stressors. Students with high levels of either SEI or M EI should have used campus resources that could help reduce their Stress levels.

Conclusion

Our findings indicate that even if EI is not directly related to students' better outcomes, it contributes profoundly to the overall student experience. There is a further need for recommendations on how EI can be learnt toward improving student well-being and academic and personal success.

Keywords

Emotional Intelligence, academic performance, Stress Resilience, student mental health.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in managing Stress and achieving academic success. Students' struggles with academic and personal Stress have highlighted EI as a critical element in promoting mental well-being and performance. EI, which involves understanding and managing emotions, provides cognitive flexibility and promotes intellectual, social, and personal development [1]. EI was first developed in 1990 with the perception of researchers and psychologists that this would be one of the critical dimensions of human nature [2]. Since then, it has been advanced as a marker for success in clinical performance, communication, and other skills [3].

According to a previous study, EI stands for social intelligence that involves recognizing, controlling, and using emotions in governing behaviour, thought, and decision-making [4][5]. Though there are variants in terms of definition, its implications in handling stress and academic challenges are widely acknowledged [6].

New stressors of academic pressure and fear of failing to meet set standards occur at entry into higher education. Traditional indicators of academic success, such as grade point average and standardized test scores, yield only minimal insight into the traits and behaviours that are necessary for holistic success and well-being [8]. To consider how stable personality traits might influence students' emotional experiences in better understanding the relationship between students' emotions and academic performance, is indispensable [9].

Some studies have also documented the enhancement of academic performance, Stress manageability, and levels of job satisfaction for dental students in different regions [10]. Educational interventions on EI are also found to be effective in reducing the Stress level of academic activities among students and enhancing their ability to cope with Stress. The previous study was observed in studies involving students from Iran [7]. High EI levels are associated positively with the academic performance of students among many significant numbers of studies for adolescents [11][12]. For instance, a study of Pakistani KUST students reported superior EI in self-awareness, self-growth, honesty, relationship management, and empathy among the students. Despite these findings, questions still need to be answered – does EI exist innately, or is it acquired? Is there a specific definition of EI, or is it nebulous? How does one measure it accurately? [6].

This research investigation will delve into EI and student performance in higher education in Pakistan. Evidently, unless the impact that EI has on the well-being and success of students becomes more clearly understood, educators will not be able to devise better strategies for education and thereby suggest how EI training may be incorporated into academic curricula in order to prepare students appropriately with the emotional skills in support of growth at both personal and academic levels.

Rational

EI has been described as the ability to recognize and interact with emotions mainly through discriminating, regulating, and appraising personal feelings or emotions in others. It has been found to play a significant role in many aspects of human functioning, especially in the learning situation. With increased academic challenges, university students are exposed to various Stress levels, which, in turn, has several negative implications for their health and academics. Of the antecedent variables, significant research attention has been devoted to cognitive Intelligence or IQ and prior academic achievements. Empirical evidence from recent days suggests that traits such as emotional Intelligence could also be relevant determinants of academic performance and coping over and above the cognitive variables. Because of this, educators need to recognize the role EI plays in learners' academic performance to promote both students' academic achievements and psychological well-being. Improved Stress management, interpersonal conflict, and motivation are just some benefits of high EI that can improve a student's performance. More so, though scholars have recently begun to show more interest in the concept of EI, there still needs to be more information regarding how it impacts university students' academic performance and their coping behaviours toward Stress. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the effectiveness of emotional Intelligence as a potential factor that can impact academic performances and the Stress levels that university learners experience. Such research relationships will give helpful information concerning the role and ways of promoting emotional Intelligence for overall student success. They might also help design interventions and educational programs to improve EI support for academic performance and psychological well-being.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between emotional Intelligence and academic success among university students.
2. To explore how emotional Intelligence influences university students' Stress management strategies.
3. To analyze emotional Intelligence's role in moderating academic Stress's impact on mental well-being.

Material And Methods

The current quantitative cross-sectional study explores the relationship of emotional Intelligence with Stress management in students of the University of Pakistan. For the study, only adults aged 18 years or above were included who provided informed consent. The inclusion criteria included that the participant was a currently enrolled underrepresented student from the university and must be between the age group of 18 to 30 years. Inclusion criteria Individuals who have not been enrolled in any university and whose age is more than 30 years are excluded to maintain the consistency of the sample. Data collection was retrieved by online surveys that were dispersed in Pakistan from August 2024 to September 2024.

Sample and sampling technique

The study included participants who were more than 18 years old and had given their informed consent. However, the persons unable to fit the selection criteria, such as a person age above 30 years old or not having any university at the time of the study, were excluded from participating in the study. The estimated sample size came to be 207. Calculation of sample size with the WHO formula uses a 95% confidence level, an expected population proportion of 0.09 and an absolute precision of 0.05. The investigators, while conducting the present study, opted for purposive sampling due to time and resource constraints.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

To evaluate Emotional Intelligence, perceived stress, and academic stress among university students, the following instruments were used. The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF) developed by Petrides in 2009 was used to measure the Emotional Intelligence of the participants. The self-report instrument was on a Likert scale with 7 points, which ranges from 1 Completely Disagree to 7 Completely Agree. A higher score thus denotes a more emotionally intelligent person. The reliability of the TEIQue-SF is well established, with Cronbach's alpha ranging between 0.84 and 0.89.

To measure perceived stress, the Perceived Stress Scale by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein in 1983 was used. The PSS is a 10-item scale in which respondents report their feelings of Stress over the past month. Responses were rated on a scale from 0 to 4 (Never to Very Often), and it has proven good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78. Higher scores on the PSS indicate higher levels of perceived Stress.

Academic stress was measured using the Academic Stress Scale consisting of 40 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale from Never to Always. High scores indicated high levels of academic Stress. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for this scale are reportedly between 0.87 and 0.90, which means this scale is reliable and has good internal consistency.

A questionnaire was designed to collect relevant data. This included demographic-related questions and details about Emotional Intelligence, Perceived Stress, and Academic Stress. The participants were asked to answer based on their experience as university students. Google Forms were utilized in conducting the survey. According to their convenience, the respondents could access the form between August and September 2024.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board before making a collection of data. The participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity in every stage of it. They were allowed to withdraw entirely from the study and could neither reveal their identity nor disclose any information gathered or obtained during or after the study process. Their privacy and security were never to be inviolated at any time.

The data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics v26 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY). Descriptive statistics summarized demographic characteristics, whereas chi-square tests evaluated the associations between Emotional Intelligence scores and several categorical outcome measures. For all the statistical tests, a cutoff point for significance of $p < 0.05$ was applied.

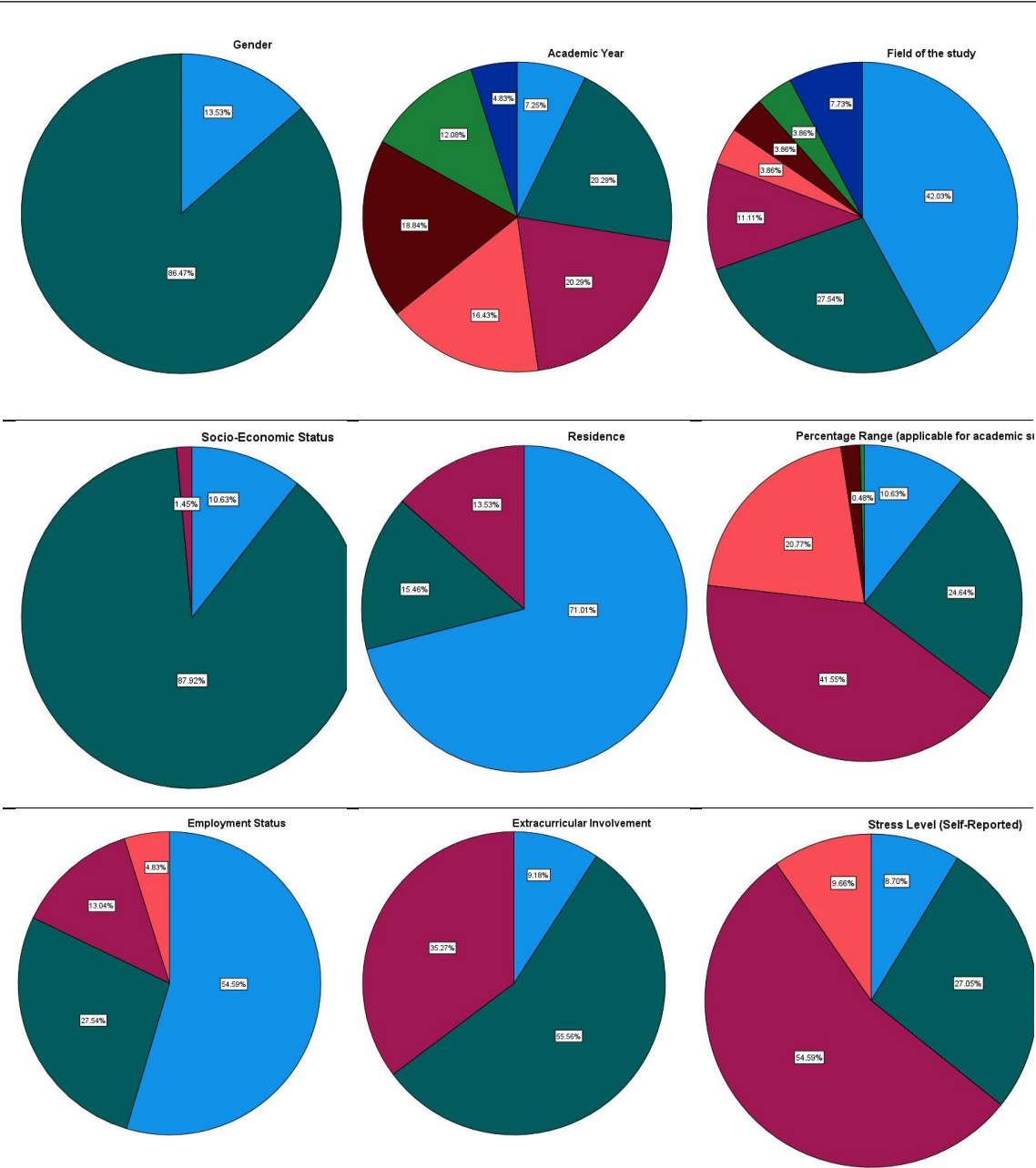
Results

Table 1: Demographic and Academic Characteristics of University Students: A Comprehensive Overview

Variable	Options	Frequency (Percent)
Gender	Male	28 (13.5%)
	Female	179 (86.5%)
Academic Year	1st Year	15 (7.2%)
	2nd Year	42 (20.3%)
	3rd Year	42 (20.3%)
	4th Year	34 (16.4%)
	Final Year	39 (18.8%)
	Graduate Student	25 (12.1%)
	Others	10 (4.8%)
Field of Study	Medicine	87 (42.0%)
	Social Sciences	57 (27.5%)

	Science	23 (11.1%)
	Business	8 (3.9%)
	Arts	8 (3.9%)
	Engineering	8 (3.9%)
	Others	16 (7.7%)
Socio-Economic Status	High	22 (10.6%)
	Middle	182 (87.9%)
	Low	3 (1.4%)
Residence	With Family	147 (71.0%)
	On-Campus	32 (15.5%)
	Off-Campus	28 (13.5%)
Nationality	Pakistani	206 (99.5%)
	British	1 (0.5%)
Percentage Range (Academic Success)	90% and above	22 (10.6%)
	80% - 89%	51 (24.6%)
	70% - 79%	86 (41.5%)
	60% - 69%	43 (20.8%)
	50% - 59%	4 (1.9%)
	Below 50%	1 (0.5%)
Employment Status	Full-time Student	113 (54.6%)
	Unemployed	57 (27.5%)
	Part-time Employed	27 (13.0%)
	Full-time Employed	10 (4.8%)
Extracurricular Involvement	Highly Involved	19 (9.2%)
	Moderately Involved	115 (55.6%)
	Not Involved	73 (35.3%)
Stress Level (Self-Reported)	Very High	18 (8.7%)
	High	56 (27.1%)
	Moderate	113 (54.6%)
	Low	20 (9.7%)
Use of Campus Resources for Stress	No	184 (88.9%)
	Yes	21 (10.1%)
	Very High	2 (1.0%)
Age (Years)	Mean (SD)	21.8164 (2.65219)

Table 1 summarizes the demographic and academic profiles of the university students surveyed. Variables here include gender, academic year, academic field, socio-economic background, place of residence, country of origin, academic performance in percentiles, employment status while studying, involvement in extracurricular activities, Stress levels, use of campus resources for Stress management, and age. The table indicates how students were classified under these criteria and gives the frequency and percentage distribution for each category. Some findings are that students who were women (86.5%), from a middle socio-economic background (87.9%), and living with their families (71.0%) made up the majority.



Graphical representation of demographic data of the students
Table 2: Impact of Emotional Intelligence Scores on Extracurricular Involvement, Perceived Stress, Academic Stress, and Use of Campus Resources among Students

		Extracurricular Involvement				
		Highly involved	Moderately involved	Not involved	Total	P value
EIQ Score Level	Average Score (31-70)	19	99	54	172	.012
	High Score (71-100)	0	16	19	35	
	Total	19	115	73	207	
		Perceived Stress Level				
		Low Stress (0-13)	Moderate Stress (14-26)	High Stress (27-40)	Total	P value
	Average Score (31-70)	15	123	34	172	.917

	High Score (71-100)	3	24	8	35	
	Total	18	147	42	207	
		Academic Stress Level				
		Low Stress (1-30)	Average Stress (31-70)	High Stress (71-100)	Total	P value
	Average Score (31-70)	6	131	35	172	.519
	High Score (71-100)	0	27	8	35	
	Total	6	158	43	207	
		Use of Campus Resources for Stress Management				
		No	Yes	Very High	Total	P value
	Average Score (31-70)	154	17	1	172	.433
	High Score (71-100)	30	4	1	35	
	Total	184	21	2	207	

Table 2 examines the relationship of EIQ to a range of student outcome variables which include extracurricular involvement, perceived Stress, academic Stress, and use of campus resources in managing Stress. The analysis shows a significant relationship between EIQ scores and extracurricular involvement, $p = .012$ that pupils whose EIQ scores are higher have moderate or higher engagement in extracurricular activities than those with average scores. However, EIQ scores did not show any meaningful relationships with students' perceived levels of Stress, $p = 0.917$; their reported academic levels of Stress, $p = 0.519$; nor the use of campus resources to manage Stress, $p = 0.433$. It appears that while Emotional Intelligence was an influencing factor in students' extra-academic activities, it did not impinge upon their Stress levels or campus usage in managing that Stress.

Table 3: Impact of Emotional Intelligence Scores on Marks Percentage Score and Employment Status among Students

		Percentage Range (applicable for academic success)							
		90% and above	80% - 89%	70% - 79%	60% - 69%	50% - 59%	Below 50%	Total	P Value
EIQ Score Level	Average Score (31-70)	18	42	72	35	4	1	172	.947
	High Score (71-100)	4	9	14	8	0	0	35	
	Total	22	51	86	43	4	1	207	
		Employment Status							
		Full-time student (no employment)	Unemployed	Part-time employed	Full-time employed			Total	P value
	Average Score (31-70)	89	49	25	9			172	.270
	High Score (71-100)	24	8	2	1			35	
	Total	113	57	27	10			207	

Table 3 spreads out the effect of students's Emotional Intelligence Scores towards their academic performance as well as their employment status. Students are categorized into groups based on their level of EIQ, and these scores correlate with both academic success, expressed in percentage ranges, and employment status. These results show no statistically significant relationship between EIQ with academic performance ($p = .947$) or employment status ($p = .270$), which implies that scores on EIQ fail to be a good predictor of those outcomes in this sample of university students.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that academic success or Stress management strategies are not foreseen as key variables affected by EI among university students, whereas in contrast, [13] illustrated an outcome wherein she claimed that EI, coupled with personality factors like neuroticism, fully mediated the relationship between self-concept and academic Stress. As described by [13]. Whereas the purpose of EI is to reduce Stress, the correlation in our study does not hold, $p = 0.519$. This indicates that a variable other than EI exerts a more significant influence on this phenomenon. Similarly, [14] reported no meaningful relationship between EI and academic success. This again falls squarely within our findings, where EI has no direct influence on students' academic outcomes, $p = 0.947$. Contrarily, [15], in a robust positive association between EI and academic performance, aspects such as self-development, predictability, and emotional stability performed very well as predictors; this difference proves that the enigma surrounding EI's involvement in an academic setup is such that its effects may differ concerning the educational setting, cultural orientation, and instrument of measurement. Whereas some studies have validated EI appropriateness, our results suggest that abilities, as described, should be understood within nuanced terms because such skills may not work for all students.

Some results of the current challenge include findings by [16], who observed a positive correlation between EI and academic success among South African engineering students, particularly in dimensions such as decision-making and Stress management, where EI scores positively correlated with better academic outcomes. Compared with EI, [17] has also reported a positive effect of EI on the academic performance of engineering students in Pakistan, furthering the role of EI in academic achievement, with significant correlations observed in domains such as self-awareness and social management. In contrast, our study failed to identify a substantial predictive value of EI for academic outcomes ($p = 0.947$); this infers that the EI-academic performance connection might be context-dependent or influenced by unknown factors not considered in the studies. [18] found that some EI subfactors like SEAR were significantly related to academic achievement for Kuwaiti students, but our data suggest that such associations are genuine sometimes. The discrepancies between these studies demonstrate that the EI and its relation to academic outcomes may be much more detailed and could interact significantly with aspects of student populations and learning contexts.

The current study starkly contradicts those of several other studies. [19] a meta-analysis indicated that EI is a positive predictor of academic performance with a general effect size of $\rho = 0.20$, implying a consistent positive relationship across diverse contexts. Further, [20] has depicted EI and emo-sensory Intelligence as considerable predictors of academic success, indicating a more comprehensive cognitive and emotional framework being at play. However, our findings align with [21], where EI was valuable for managing academic Stress but did not predict universal academic success. This was because their conclusions were stated in mixed results depending on context. Of utmost importance, [13] built a few elements of EI, such as empathy and self-control, relevant to developing pre-service teachers' coping strategies. However, they did not establish a direct relationship to the academic performance scale. These gaps underscore the complexity of EI's role and potential influence on academic outcomes and Stress management, which may be dramatically contextual, student population, and educational setting-dependent.

Limitations and Strength

Though this study demonstrated that a sample size of 207 was sufficient, such a generalization may only hold in some educational settings. Data collection relied on self-report questionnaires; the outcome may need to be more objective as some tend to report what they think the questionnaire was set to reveal. Moreover, other personality variables and environmental factors that would influence the outcome were not controlled in this study, which impacts the validity of the results. The sample size increases the reliability of findings within the specific population under study, which is a strength of this study. The nature of purposive sampling made it possible to select participants who were most likely to provide insightful information in answering the research questions. Finally, focusing on EI deepens insight into how EI might affect academically relevant issues, such as academic achievement and Stress coping. It thus opens prospects for future research into this line of thought.

Conclusion

Accordingly, the study concludes that emotional Intelligence does not need to be an enabling factor and is vulnerable to different academic experiences and Stress for university-level students. Therefore, it should be addressed. Since no direct change is identified, the study argues that there may still be some merit in further exploration into emotional Intelligence, especially regarding how to enable improved support regarding one's success both within and outside the classroom.

Authors' contributions:

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Writing - Review & Editing: Zainab Mahmood, Razan Mohammad Makki Bakhsh, Ume Rubab, Areesha

Supervision: Sherbano

Disclosure

Ethical Considerations: This research was carried out in adherence to all relevant ethical norms, and approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Brain Tech Clinic and Research Center with approval number IRB-2024-0015. Before participation, all participants gave informed consent. The study guarantees that the participants' rights, privacy, and confidentiality were upheld throughout the study.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest relevant to the content of this manuscript.

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