

Exploring the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Stress among Undergraduate Students

*Vijay Kumar Chhabra

Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a significant psychological construct influencing students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and ability to manage stress. The present study investigates the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among college students. A descriptive and exploratory research design was adopted, and data were collected from 100 students enrolled in various colleges in Ludhiana, Punjab. The findings indicate that students with higher levels of emotional intelligence demonstrate better emotional regulation, decision-making abilities, and coping strategies, which contribute to lower perceived stress. Academic workload, examinations, family expectations, and future career concerns were identified as major stressors. The study highlights the importance of integrating emotional intelligence development programs into higher education to enhance students' resilience and mental health.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Stress, College Students, Academic Performance, Mental Health, Coping Strategies*

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and others (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). The concept gained widespread recognition through the work of Goleman (1995), who argued that emotional competencies often contribute more significantly to life success than cognitive intelligence alone.

In contemporary educational settings, students encounter numerous psychological and academic challenges. Academic competition, examinations, social relationships, family expectations, and uncertainty regarding future careers frequently contribute to elevated stress levels (Chandra, 2021). Stress is defined as the psychological and physiological response that occurs when individuals perceive that environmental demands exceed their coping resources (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Research has consistently demonstrated that emotional intelligence serves as a protective factor against stress. Students possessing high emotional intelligence are better equipped to regulate emotions, seek social support, and engage in adaptive coping strategies (Albani,

Ambrosini, Mancini, Passini and Biolcati 2023). Consequently, they experience lower levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress than their peers with lower emotional intelligence.

The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence. Students with stronger emotional competencies reported better adaptation to online learning, social isolation, and uncertainty compared with students demonstrating lower emotional intelligence (Majeed, Sanuddin and Mazlan, 2023).

The present study examines the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among college students and explores how emotional competencies influence stress management and overall well-being.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To understand emotional intelligence among students.
2. To identify the major causes of stress among students.

*Assistant Professor, Sri Aurobindo College of Commerce and Management, Ludhiana, Email id- vc@saccm.in

3. To analyse the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among college students.

Conceptual Framework

The study assumes that emotional intelligence enhances an individual's ability to understand, regulate, and manage emotions effectively. Students possessing higher emotional intelligence are expected to adopt better coping strategies, maintain emotional stability, and experience lower levels of stress. Thus, emotional intelligence is considered an important psychological resource influencing stress management among college students.

Literature Review

Mayer and Salovey (1997) conceptualized emotional intelligence as a set of abilities involving emotional perception, facilitation of thinking, understanding emotions, and emotion regulation. Their model remains one of the most influential frameworks in emotional intelligence research.

Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic success. Shengyao, Xuefen, Jenatabadi, Samsudin, Chunchun, and Ishak (2024) found that emotional intelligence significantly predicts both academic achievement and psychological well-being among university students.

Several studies have examined emotional intelligence as a buffer against stress. Bermejo-Martins, Luis, Fernandez-Berrocal, Martínez and Sarrionandia (2021) found that self-care behaviors mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress.

Robbins, Brown and Marks (2024) reported that emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between stress and depressive symptoms among college students.

Khorasani, Ardameh and Sany (2023) studies that emotional intelligence training significantly reduced academic stress among medical students. Similarly, Falade, Adebayo,

Eegunranti and Fatusi. (2025) observed that emotional intelligence contributes positively to academic performance while reducing psychiatric morbidity among undergraduates. Student stress has been extensively documented in educational research. Chandra (2021) found that academic demands and online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic increased stress among students. Majeed, Sanuddin and Mazlan (2023) reported that emotional intelligence significantly reduces stress and enhances coping abilities among university students.

Collectively, the literature suggests that emotional intelligence serves as a critical psychological resource that promotes resilience, effective coping, and academic success while reducing perceived stress.

Research Methodology

A cross-sectional survey method was employed to collect data from respondents. The study was conducted among 100 undergraduate students aged between 18 and 23 years enrolled in various colleges in Ludhiana, Punjab. Respondents were selected through a non-probability convenience sampling technique. Efforts were made to ensure adequate representation of both male and female students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising two sections. The first section measured emotional intelligence dimensions such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, motivation, empathy, and interpersonal skills. The second section assessed stress-related experiences associated with academic workload, examinations, family expectations, and career concerns.

Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among college students.

H11: There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among college students.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, percentage analysis, and correlation analysis to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress.

Results and Findings

Emotional Intelligence Findings

Emotional Intelligence Indicators	
Statement	Agree (%)
Encourage others during difficulties	77
Motivate others to take initiative	84
Make balanced decisions	79
Pay attention to others' concerns	84
Listen patiently to others	72
Consider others' viewpoints	85

Table-1

As highlighted in table-1 the results indicate that most respondents demonstrated moderate to high levels of emotional intelligence. Specifically: The findings indicate that most respondents possess moderate to high levels of emotional intelligence. Most students demonstrated strong abilities in motivation, decision-making, emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal relationships. About 77% of respondents reported being able to encourage others during difficult situations, while 84% could motivate others to take initiative.

Additionally, 79% stated that they make balanced decisions using both emotions and reasoning, and a similar proportion remained confident in their beliefs despite criticism. High levels of empathy and social competence were also evident, with 84% paying attention to others' concerns, 72% listening patiently, and 85% considering others' viewpoints before making judgments. Overall, the findings suggest that students possess satisfactory emotional intelligence, enabling them to effectively manage personal, social, and academic challenges.

Stress-Related Findings

Stress Factor	%age
Career uncertainty	58%
Anxiety about examination results	55%
Nervousness before examinations	52%
Disturbed sleep during examinations	48%
Difficulty concentrating	47%
Feeling mentally blank during examinations	45%
Family expectations	44%
Unable to perform according to expectations	41%

Table-2

The study identified several significant sources of stress among students: As shown in table 2, the findings indicate that most respondents possess moderate to high levels of emotional intelligence. Most students demonstrated strong abilities in motivation, decision-making, empathy, and interpersonal relationships. About 77% of respondents reported being able to encourage others during difficult situations, while 84% could motivate others to take initiative. Additionally, 79% stated that they make balanced decisions using both emotions and reasoning. High levels of empathy and social competence were also evident, with 84% paying attention to others' concerns, 72% listening patiently, and 85% considering others' viewpoints before making judgments. Overall, the findings suggest that students possess satisfactory emotional intelligence, enabling them to effectively manage personal, social, and academic challenges.

Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Stress

Pearson correlation coefficient came out to be $r = -0.62$ ($p < 0.001$) indicating a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress. This implies that students with higher emotional intelligence will have lower stress level. The result has supported the alternative hypothesis that a significant relationship exists between

emotional intelligence and stress among college students.

The findings indicate that emotional intelligence and stress are closely related among college students. Students demonstrating higher levels of emotional awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and decision-making ability reported better coping with academic and personal challenges. These students appeared more capable of managing examination pressure, family expectations, and future career concerns. Conversely, respondents exhibiting lower emotional control were more likely to report symptoms such as anxiety, nervousness, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, and fear of academic failure.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the statistical findings demonstrate that students possessing higher emotional intelligence exhibit greater emotional stability, motivation, and decision-making ability, which contribute to better stress management. Conversely, academic workload, examinations, family expectations, and future-related concerns remain major sources of stress among college students. These findings support the view that emotional intelligence functions as a protective psychological resource that helps students cope effectively with stress and maintain emotional well-being.

Discussion

The findings support existing literature indicating that emotional intelligence functions as a protective factor against stress. Students possessing higher emotional intelligence appear better equipped to regulate emotions, maintain interpersonal relationships, and engage in adaptive coping strategies. The results align with the findings of Robbins, Brown, Marks (2024), who reported that emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between stress and depressive symptoms. Similarly, Bermejo-Martins, Luis,

Fernandez-Berrocal, Martínez and Sarrionandia (2021) emphasized the mediating role of self-care behaviours in reducing stress among emotionally intelligent individuals. The study also supports the work of Khorasani, Ardameh, Sany (2023), which demonstrated that emotional intelligence interventions can reduce academic stress. Students who effectively understand and manage emotions are more likely to interpret challenges as manageable rather than overwhelming. These findings highlight the importance of integrating emotional intelligence training into educational institutions. Such interventions may improve psychological resilience, academic performance, and overall student well-being.

Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among college students in Ludhiana, Punjab. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence plays an important role in helping students cope with academic and personal stressors. Students possessing higher levels of emotional intelligence demonstrated greater emotional stability, empathy, self-regulation, motivation, and decision-making ability.

The study identified examinations, academic expectations, family pressure, and career uncertainty as the major sources of stress among students. Emotional intelligence appears to enhance students' capacity to manage these challenges effectively and maintain psychological well-being. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence development programs, counselling services, stress-management workshops, and life-skills education within higher educational institutions. Such initiatives can contribute significantly to improving students' emotional resilience, academic success, and overall quality of life.

Future Scope

The present study provides several opportunities for future research. Further studies may be conducted using larger and more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of the findings across different student populations. Longitudinal research could examine how emotional intelligence and stress levels change over time and influence students' academic and personal development. Future researchers may also investigate the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training and intervention programs in reducing stress and enhancing students' coping abilities. Comparative studies across gender, academic disciplines, educational levels, and cultural backgrounds could provide deeper insights into variations in emotional intelligence and stress experiences. Additionally, future research may explore the role of mediating and moderating factors such as resilience, self-efficacy, mindfulness, social support, and coping strategies in shaping the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among students.

References

- Albani, A., Ambrosini, F., Mancini, G., Passini, S. and Biolcati, R. (2023). Trait emotional intelligence and self-regulated learning in higher education. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 189, Article 112499. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2022.111999>.
- Bermejo-Martins, E., Luis, E.O., Fernandez-Berrocal, P., Martínez, M. & Sarrionandia, A. (2021). The role of emotional intelligence and self-care in students' stress and well-being. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 175, 110724. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110679>
- Chandra, Y. (2021). Online education during COVID-19: Perception of academic stress and coping among students. *Educational Researcher*, 10(2), 229–247. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-05-2020-0097>
- Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24(4), 385–396.
- Falade, J., Adebayo, E.T., Eegunranti, B.A. & Fatusi, A.O. (2025). Connecting emotional intelligence with academic performance and psychiatric morbidity in fresh undergraduates. *Frontiers in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ejhs.v35i1.7>
- Folkman, S. (2013). Stress: Appraisal and Coping. In: Gellman, M.D., Turner, J.R. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Behavioral Medicine*. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1005-9_215.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. Bantam Books.
- Khorasani, E.C., Ardameh, M. and Sany, S.B.T. (2023). The influence of emotional intelligence on academic stress among medical students in Neyshabur, Iran. *BMC Psychiatry* 23, 848. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-023-05344-0>
- Lazarus, R., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*. New York: Springer
- Majeed, H. B. A., Sanuddin, N. D. B., & Mazlan, S. A. B. (2023). Emotional intelligence and stress among university students during COVID-19. *Int J of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(2), <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i2/>
- Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997). What is emotional intelligence? In P. Salovey & D. Sluyter (Eds.), *Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Educational implications* (pp. 3–31). Basic Books.
- Mayer, J. D., Roberts, R. D., & Barsade, S. G. (2008). Human abilities: Emotional intelligence. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 59, 507–536.
- Robbins, M. M., Brown, K.G. & Marks, A. (2024). Emotional intelligence moderates the stress-depression link in college students

before and during COVID. *Curr Psychol*, 43, 17854–17865. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-05178-9>

Schutte, N. S., Malouff, J. M., & Bhullar, N. (2007). A meta-analytic investigation of the relationship between emotional intelligence and health. *Personality and Individual*

Differences, 42(5), 921–933. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2006.09.003>

Shengyao, Y., Xuefen, L., Jenatabadi, H. S., Samsudin, N., Chunchun, K. & Ishak, Z. (2024). Emotional intelligence impact on academic achievement and psychological well-being: A cross-sectional study. *BMC Psychology*, 12, Article 34.