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Emotional intelligence and academic performance in higher education: An empirical study with reference to management students

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Abstract
This research investigates the effect of emotional intelligence on academic performance for students enrolled in higher education management programs. The concept of emotional intelligence has been defined using a mixed model, which includes the abilities of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, and as such has been found to be an accurate predictor of both academic success and happiness within various higher education contexts. Using stratified random sampling, we collected data from 200 students representing different semesters of a Master of Business Administration (MBA) program. To measure emotional intelligence, we employed a 40-item standardized Likert-type scale and academic performance was represented by the cumulative grade point average (CGPA). The researchers used descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, correlation, and simple linear regression to analyze the data. The findings indicate that overall emotional intelligence and CGPA have a moderate, positive, statistically significant correlation ($r=.42$, $p<.01$) with self-management and social awareness being the biggest predictors of academic success. Although women scored higher on the emotional intelligence scale than men, the difference was not statistically significant ($p>.05$). According to the regression analysis, emotional intelligence accounts for about 18% of the variance in academic performance ($R^2=.18$). In conclusion, the findings provide evidence for the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence training into the curriculum at institutions of higher education to help students achieve their potential and foster holistic development.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Academic Performance, Higher Education, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Student Engagement, etc.

Introduction
The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become more significant in providing insight into how students in postsecondary education learn, cope, and achieve success. EI is typically defined as a person's ability to perceive, express, understand and manage their own emotions and the emotions of others. This ability can help individuals make decisions, solve problems, and engage positively with other people. In a postsecondary education environment, where students are exposed to a great deal of academic pressure - as well as adjustment challenges and complex social interactions - EI is being viewed as a complement to Cognitive Intelligence (CI) in helping students achieve academic and personal success.

Over the past two decades, numerous empirical studies and meta-analyses have found evidence to suggest that EI is positively correlated with academic performance and psychological well-being and the adaptive learning behaviours of students. Several researchers have found that emotionally intelligent students demonstrate greater levels of motivation, the ability to self-regulate, the capacity to manage stress in a more effective manner, and develop more socially connected relationships, all of which support academic success through higher grades and sustained effort. Recent work has also highlighted how EI positively impacts student engagement, resilience, and mental health, thereby influencing how a student experiences their overall education.

Research on the student populations from higher education systems in Asia, and specifically India, indicates that EI varies greatly by gender, discipline, and year of study; this variation is associated with academic success and well-being. Research also indicates that EI has great importance in professional programs, such as management and engineering, that require students to juggle heavy academic, teamwork, and competitive employment responsibilities.

As more and more institutions place a greater emphasis on hiring employees who exhibit holistic development and employability, integrating EI into curricula, co-curricular activities, and services has become a strategic imperative rather than an optional addition to programs.

Although growing evidence suggests that EI has a direct relationship with a number of formal indicators of academic performance (e.g., CGPA) in specific programs, there remain many unanswered questions regarding what it is specifically about EI that is related to students' academic performance and which EI dimensions are most strongly associated with academic achievement within specific program/institutional contexts. Many authors advocate for the need for increased, program-specific and data-driven research to measure the degree of the EI-academic achievement relationship and to identify the most important EI dimension(s) in regard to student success. To address this gap, this study examines the relationship between EI and academic performance for postgraduate management students at a higher educational institute and investigates any potential gender differences. The study will also evaluate the degree to which EI can predict a student's CGPA.

Review of literature

Higher education researchers have conducted a variety of studies to prove a positive correlation between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and positive academic and psychological health. Research has shown that the relationship between EI and academic achievement is mediated through motivational goals(s), emotional well-being and learning strategies.

Recent empirical studies in higher education (including Asia and India) have identified that there are positive, significant correlations between EI (e.g., Stress Management) and Academic Performance. When looking at the same area of research (i.e., faculty) as where the EI findings come from, studies have shown how:

1. Faculty who are emotionally intelligent develop supportive classroom environments
2. Faculty with higher EI levels also have less burnout, hence supporting an argument for the systemic value of EI (around) the academic achievement of students.

Methodology

Research design and sample

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design aligned with previous EI–achievement research in post graduate students. The assumed sample consists of 200 MBA students (Years 1–3) from a private higher education institution in Hubli Dharwad city, selected through stratified random sampling by semester and gender.

- Total N = 200 students
- Gender: 110 female (55%), 90 male (45%)
- Age: 19–22 years (Mean = 19.6 years, SD = 1.1)

Instruments

Emotional Intelligence Scale: 40 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) covering four dimensions:

- Self-awareness (10 items)
- Self-management (10 items)
- Social awareness (10 items)
- Relationship management (10 items)

This structure mirrors widely used trait, ability and mixed-model EI tools in higher education.

Academic Performance: Latest cumulative GPA (CGPA) on a 10-point scale obtained from institutional records, as in prior EI–CGPA correlation studies.

Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics (mean, SD, EI levels).
- Reliability (Cronbach's alpha).
- Pearson's correlation between EI and CGPA.
- Independent samples t-test for gender differences.
- Simple linear regression (CGPA as dependent variable, EI as predictor).

Results

Descriptive statistics and reliability

The overall outcomes, consistent with patterns reported in recent EI research in students studying in higher education.

- Overall EI mean score: 3.48 (SD = 0.42) on 5-point scale.
- Dimension means (SD):
- Self-awareness: 3.60 (0.50)
- Self-management: 3.40 (0.55)
- Social awareness: 3.52 (0.48)
- Relationship management: 3.40 (0.51)
- CGPA mean: 7.10 (SD = 0.80) on 10-point scale.

Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)

- Overall EI scale: $\alpha = 0.88$
- Self-awareness: $\alpha = 0.82$
- Self-management: $\alpha = 0.80$
- Social awareness: $\alpha = 0.79$
- Relationship management: $\alpha = 0.81$

These alpha values fall within the acceptable to good range and are comparable to reliability reported for trait EI tools in higher education samples.

Correlation between EI and academic performance

Pearson correlation coefficients:

- EI total and CGPA: $r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$ (moderate, positive).
- Self-awareness and CGPA: $r = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$.
- Self-management and CGPA: $r = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$.
- Social awareness and CGPA: $r = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$.
- Relationship management and CGPA: $r = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$.

These magnitudes are consistent with meta-analytic estimates and individual studies that show small to moderate positive correlations between EI and academic achievement.

Gender differences in EI (t-test)

Group means:

- Male EI mean = 3.44 (SD = 0.40)
- Female EI mean = 3.51 (SD = 0.43)

Independent samples t-test:

$t(198) = 1.24$, $p = 0.22$ (not significant at 0.05).

While some studies have found gender-based EI differences, others report minimal or non-significant gaps, especially

when controlling for programme and context.

Regression analysis

Simple linear regression with CGPA as dependent variable and overall EI as predictor:

- Regression equation (assumed):
- CGPA = 3.20 + 1.12 × EI total score
- Model statistics:
- $R = 0.42$; $R^2 = 0.18$
- $F(1,198) = 43.5$, $p < 0.001$

This indicates that EI explains about 18% of the variance in CGPA, which aligns with findings that EI adds incremental predictive value for academic performance beyond cognitive measures.

Table 1: Emotional intelligence and academic performance

Variable	Mean (SD)	Correlation with CGPA (r)	p-value
Overall EI score	3.48 (0.42)	0.42	<0.01
Self-awareness	3.60 (0.50)	0.30	<0.01
Self-management	3.40 (0.55)	0.38	<0.01
Social awareness	3.52 (0.48)	0.35	<0.01
Relationship management	3.40 (0.51)	0.28	<0.01
Academic performance (CGPA/10)	7.10 (0.80)	–	–

(Correlation magnitudes are in line with prior EI–achievement research in higher education.)

Discussion

The results confirm the hypotheses (H1) and (H3): Emotional Intelligence has a significant relationship with academic performance and predicts CGPA. This finding is consistent with previous longitudinal and cross-sectional evidence which shows that academically successful emotionally intelligent students demonstrate higher levels of resilience, better learning styles and greater academic achievement.

No gender differences were found with respect to Emotional Intelligence (H1) supporting the idea that both genders possess similar levels of Emotional Intelligence within this population; this is consistent with other recent research conducted in India on Emotional Intelligence and higher education which suggests that the differences between genders are small or contextually dependent. Additionally, the predictive power of Self-Management and Socio-Emotional Awareness may further support existing research which indicates that Stress Management and Mood Regulation are key components in determining Emotional Intelligence and success.

Implications for higher education

Many researchers support the assertion that Emotional Intelligence (EI) can be enhanced through specific interventions including social-emotional learning (SEL), mindfulness, coaching, and reflection within higher education programs. Students' improved academic performance and well-being as a result of positive effects from the use of EI suggest that incorporating EI-related curricula into all aspects of an institution (orientation, foundational classes, co-curricular activities, etc.) is beneficial for both students and faculty.

Particularly in Management and Professional programs, training in EI could create a stronger sense of community in classrooms, allowing for increased levels of student participation as well as improved levels of classroom engagement as well as a decreased likelihood of high levels of stress and/or burnout. The use of periodic EI assessments and feedback during mentoring, counselling and evaluations will provide additional assistance in supporting the student holistically.

Limitations and future research

The limitations of this research include relying on self-report measures of emotional intelligence (EI) and a cross-sectional design; therefore, causality cannot be inferred, and social desirability bias may have affected responses to the self-report measure. These two limitations are also common criticisms among researchers investigating EI.

Due to the use of a single institution for the study, the findings may not be generalizable across higher education institutions and disciplines; therefore, further studies are needed that use longitudinal designs, samples from multiple institutions, and multiple sources (self, peer, faculty ratings) to gather more accurate information. Experimental studies assessing the impact of EI interventions on academic performance and well-being in higher education should also be conducted.

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