

# The Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Stress and Academic Performance Among College Students – A Critical Review

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**Abstract:** College life is considered an important transitional phase in an individual's life. During this period, students experience academic pressure, emotional instability, interpersonal conflicts and uncertainty regarding career and future goals. These stressors negatively affect students and mental health and academic performance. Emotional intelligence had emerged as an important psychological construct that helps individual understand, regulate and manage emotions effectively. Researchers have found that emotional intelligence contributes positively to stress management, emotional adjustment, resilience, an academic achievement among students. The present review paper examines studies related to emotional intelligence, stress, and academic performance among college students. The paper mainly focuses on understanding the relationship and interaction between emotional intelligence, stress, and academic performance.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Stress, Academic Performance, College Students.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, emotional intelligence has gained significant attention in the field of psychology and education. Modern educational environments expose students to various emotional and academic challenges, making emotional regulation and coping skills extremely important. Many college students struggle with examination pressure, relationship problems, family expectations, peer competition, and increase stress levels and negatively influence academic performance. Emotional intelligence helps students understand their own emotions and as well as the emotions of the other. Students with higher emotional intelligence are more capable of handling stressful situations, maintaining emotional balance, and developing interpersonal relationships. They also tend to show better concentration, decision-making ability and academic success.

According to Meyer and Salovey (1997), Emotional Intelligence refers to "The ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate emotions effectively." Stress, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), is "A psychological and physical response occurring when individuals perceive environmental demands as exceeding their coping resources." Academic performance refers to students' educational achievement measured through grades, concentration, learning

outcomes and productivity.

Mayer and Salovey's Ability Model explains that Emotional Intelligence as a set of emotional abilities related to emotional understanding and emotional regulation. Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory emphasizes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills as major components of Emotional Intelligence. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress explains that stress depends on an individual's perception and coping ability. These theories provide a clear understanding of Emotional Intelligence, stress, and academic performance. Therefore, the present review basically aims to understand the relationship between these variables among college students.

## 2. Literature Review

### A. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is considered as one of the most important psychological concepts influencing emotional adjustment and personal success. Researchers have extensively studied its role in education, mental health and workplace functioning.

Mayer and Salovey (1997), proposed that Emotional Intelligence involves emotional perception, emotional understanding, emotional facilitation, and emotional regulation. Goleman (1995), further emphasized that Emotional Intelligence contributes more to life success than cognitive intelligence alone.

Research by Schutte et al. (2002), found that individuals with higher Emotional Intelligence experience better emotional adjustment and lower psychological distress. Similarly, Brackett and Mayer (2003), found that Emotional Intelligence is positively associated with interpersonal functioning and emotional well-being.

Among students, Emotional Intelligence plays an important role in managing academic and social challenges. Parker et al. (2004), found that emotionally intelligent students showed better academic adaptation and educational success during the transition to college life. Research also suggests that Emotional Intelligence improves resilience, self-confidence and problem-solving ability among young adults.

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Another study conducted by MacCann *et al.* (2020), revealed that Emotional Intelligence positively predicts academic performance and psychological adjustment among students across different educational settings. These studies clearly indicate that the Emotional Intelligence is an important factor contributing to students' emotional and academic functioning.

### *B. Stress Among College Students*

Stress is one of the most common psychological problems experienced by college students. Academic workload, examinations, peer pressure, financial difficulties, and uncertainty about future careers contribute significantly to stress levels.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984), explained that stress develops when individuals perceive situations as threatening or difficult to manage. Research by Misra and McKean (2000), found that academic pressure and time management problems are major causes of stress among college students.

Beiter *et al.* (2015), revealed that anxiety, academic demands and career-related concerns are strongly associated with stress and mental health problems among university students. Chronic stress negatively affects sleep quality, emotional stability, concentration, and learning ability. Researches have also indicated that if prolonged stress increases the risk of depression, burnout and emotional exhaustion among students. Pascoe *et al.* (2020), found that academic stress significantly affects psychological well-being and educational achievement. However, protective psychological factors such as Emotional Intelligence, resilience, mindfulness, and social support help students manage stress effectively. These studies clearly explain the importance of identifying emotional factors that helps reduce stress among the college students.

### *C. Academic Performance*

Academic performance is an important indicator of students' educational success and overall functioning. It reflects on learning ability, concentration, motivation, and productivity.

Research by Richardson *et al.* (2012), found that emotional health, motivation, and self-regulation significantly influence academic achievement among students. Students with better emotional adjustment and coping strategies tend to perform better academically.

Another study by Parker *et al.* (2004), found that Emotional Intelligence predicts academic success among first-year university students. Emotional regulation and interpersonal skills contribute positively to concentration and classroom engagement.

MacCann *et al.* (2020), conducted a meta-analysis and found that Emotional Intelligence significantly predicts academic performance across different educational levels. Students with higher Emotional Intelligence tend to manage examination stress effectively and maintain better learning outcomes.

Research also suggests that stress negatively affects memory, concentration, and decision-making ability, thereby reducing academic performance. Students experiencing high stress often show poor time management and reduced academic motivation. These studies indicate that emotional and psychological factors

play a major role in determining students' academic achievement.

### *D. Emotional Intelligence and Stress*

Many studies have explored the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Stress. Research consistently shows that Emotional Intelligence helps the individuals manage stress effectively and maintain emotional balance.

Schutte *et al.* (2007), found that individuals with higher Emotional Intelligence experience lower perceived stress and better coping ability. Similarly, Mikolajczak *et al.* (2007), reported that Emotional Intelligence acts as a protective factor against emotional distress and burnout. Among college students, Emotional Intelligence contributes to emotional regulation and resilience during stressful situations. Students with high Emotional Intelligence are more likely to use adaptive coping strategies and maintain psychological well-being.

Research by Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2006), found that Emotional Intelligence negatively predicts stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms among adolescents and young adults. Emotional regulation helps students remain calm and focused during academic challenges. These findings clearly indicate that the Emotional Intelligence reduces stress and improves emotional adjustment among the students.

### *E. Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance*

Emotional Intelligence positively influences academic achievement and educational adjustment among students. Researchers suggest that emotionally intelligent students demonstrate better concentration, motivation, and learning ability.

Parker *et al.* (2004), found that the Emotional Intelligence predicts the successful academic transition among the university students. Students with higher emotional regulation and interpersonal skills showed up better academic outcomes.

Research by MacCann *et al.* (2020), further revealed that Emotional Intelligence contributes significantly to academic performance across some different age groups and educational settings. Emotional Intelligence improves problem-solving ability, self-motivation, and classroom participation.

Another study conducted by Qualter *et al.* (2012), found that Emotional Intelligence indirectly influences academic achievement through stress reduction and emotional adjustment. Students with higher Emotional Intelligence experience lower anxiety during examinations and perform better academically. These studies explain that Emotional Intelligence positively contributes to educational success and learning outcomes among students.

### *F. Stress and Academic Performance*

Stress negatively affects the students' academic functioning and learning ability. High stress levels helps to reduce concentration, memory retention, emotional stability, and classroom participation.

Research by Pascoe *et al.* (2020), revealed that academic stress negatively influences educational achievement and psychological well-being among the university students. Sleep disturbance, anxiety and emotional exhaustion caused by stress

is often impaired at academic productivity.

Similarly, Elias et al. (2011), found that students experiencing high stress showed lower GPA scores and poorer academic adjustment. Chronic stress also affects motivation and self-confidence among the students. However, students with better emotional regulation, coping strategies and Emotional Intelligence tend to manage academic stress effectively and maintain better performance. These findings suggest that stress is an important factor influencing the students' educational achievements and their mental health.

### G. Critical Review and Research Gaps

The detailed review of various research papers have been published between 1995 and 2025, which clearly indicates that the Emotional Intelligence positively influences our academic performances and negatively relates to the stress among college students. Many studies proved that Emotional Intelligence can improve emotional regulation, resilience, interpersonal relationships and the coping abilities.

Several studies also established that students with higher Emotional Intelligence experience a lower stress and better academic achievement. Emotional Intelligence acts as a protective psychological factor that enhances the emotional stability and educational success.

However, most of the studies are focused on the Western populations and limited researches have been conducted among the Indian college students. Many studies examined Emotional Intelligence and stress separately, while only a few explored Emotional Intelligence, stress, and academic performance together within a single framework.

Another major gap is that many studies have used cross-sectional research designs and self-report measures. So, Limited longitudinal studies are available as examining the long-term impact of the Emotional Intelligence on academic functioning among the students.

### 3. Conclusion and Further Implications

From this review paper, it is evident that Emotional

Intelligence positively influences academic performance and helps in reducing stress among college students. Emotional Intelligence contributes to the emotional stability, resilience, self-awareness, interpersonal adjustment and better coping strategies.

Stress negatively affects concentration, learning abilities and emotional well-being, whereas the Emotional Intelligence acts as a protective psychological factor promoting a healthier academic functioning and emotional functioning.

Further implications of this review paper suggest that the Emotional Intelligence training programs, counselling interventions, stress management workshops and emotional skill development activities should be implemented in colleges and universities. Hence, in future researches we can explore these variables among the Indian student populations by using larger and more diverse samples.

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