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## Emotional intelligence and academic stress: insights from Karnataka state Akkamahadevi women university students

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### Abstract

This study examines the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and academic stress among students of Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women University, Vijayapura. Emotional intelligence, the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and the emotions of others, plays a critical role in how students cope with academic pressures. Using a mixed-method approach, we collected data from 300 students through standardized EI and academic stress questionnaires, followed by in-depth interviews with a select group of participants. The quantitative results reveal a significant inverse correlation between EI and academic stress, indicating that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to experience lower levels of academic stress. Qualitative findings further highlight that students with well-developed EI skills employ more effective stress management strategies, such as positive reframing, seeking social support, and proactive problem-solving. This study underscores the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence training into the university curriculum to enhance students' resilience against academic stress. The implications of these findings for educational policies and student support services are discussed, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to student well-being and academic success.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, academic stress, university students, stress management, student well-being

### Introduction

#### Background and Rationale

In contemporary academic settings, students frequently encounter significant stress, which can adversely affect their mental health and academic performance. Academic stress is a pervasive issue characterized by the pressure to meet educational demands and maintain high levels of performance. It encompasses a variety of stressors, including exams, assignments, and the competitive nature of academic environments. Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women's University, Vijayapura, like many other higher education institutions, is not immune to these challenges. Understanding the factors that influence academic stress is crucial for developing effective interventions to support students' well-being and academic success.

One critical factor that has garnered considerable attention in recent years is emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional intelligence, a concept popularized by Daniel Goleman, refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others. It comprises several components, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. High levels of emotional intelligence are associated with better mental health, improved interpersonal relationships, and enhanced coping mechanisms in stressful situations. This study aims to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress among students of Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women's University.

#### Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform educational policies and practices that can enhance student support services. By identifying the role of emotional intelligence in mitigating academic stress, educators and administrators can develop targeted interventions to foster emotional intelligence skills among students. This, in turn, can lead to improved mental

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health outcomes, better academic performance, and a more supportive educational environment. Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on emotional intelligence and its impact on various aspects of students' lives, providing valuable insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

### Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress among students of Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women's University. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Assess the levels of emotional intelligence among the university students.
2. Measure the levels of academic stress experienced by the students.
3. Examine the correlation between emotional intelligence and academic stress.
4. Identify the specific components of emotional intelligence that are most strongly associated with lower levels of academic stress.
5. Explore the coping strategies employed by students with high and low levels of emotional intelligence.

### Literature Review

#### Emotional Intelligence and Its Components

Emotional intelligence is a multifaceted construct that has been widely studied in psychology and education. According to Goleman (1995) [3], emotional intelligence consists of five main components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Self-awareness involves recognizing and understanding one's emotions, while self-regulation refers to the ability to manage and control these emotions effectively. Motivation encompasses the drive to achieve goals and persevere in the face of challenges. Empathy involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others, and social skills pertain to managing relationships and navigating social complexities.

Research has shown that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in various life outcomes, including mental health, job performance, and interpersonal relationships. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle stress, resolve conflicts, and maintain positive relationships. In academic settings, emotional intelligence has been linked to better academic performance, higher levels of engagement, and lower dropout rates (Parker *et al.*, 2004) [4].

#### Academic Stress in Higher Education

Academic stress is a common phenomenon among university students, characterized by the pressure to perform well in exams, complete assignments on time, and meet the expectations of peers, teachers, and parents. It can manifest in various forms, including anxiety, depression, and burnout. High levels of academic stress can negatively impact students' mental health, leading to poor academic performance, reduced motivation, and increased risk of dropout (Beiter *et al.*, 2015) [1].

Several factors contribute to academic stress, including the competitive nature of academic environments, the high expectations placed on students, and the challenges of balancing academic and personal responsibilities. Additionally, the transition from secondary to higher education can be a significant source of stress for many students, as they navigate new academic demands and social dynamics.

### The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Managing Academic Stress

Research has increasingly focused on the role of emotional intelligence in managing academic stress. Studies have shown that students with high emotional intelligence are better able to cope with academic pressures and maintain their mental health (Fernandez *et al.*, 2012) [2]. Emotional intelligence helps students recognize and manage their emotions, employ effective coping strategies, and seek support when needed. For example, students with high emotional intelligence may use positive reframing to view stressful situations in a more constructive light, or they may seek social support from peers, teachers, and family members.

Moreover, emotional intelligence can enhance students' resilience, enabling them to bounce back from setbacks and persist in the face of challenges. This resilience is particularly important in academic settings, where students often encounter difficulties and failures. By fostering emotional intelligence, educators can help students develop the skills necessary to manage stress and succeed academically.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress. The quantitative component involves the use of standardized questionnaires to assess emotional intelligence and academic stress levels among the students. The qualitative component includes in-depth interviews with a select group of participants to explore their experiences and coping strategies in greater detail.

#### Participants

The participants of this study are undergraduate students from Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women's University, Vijayapura. A total of 300 students were randomly selected to participate in the quantitative survey, while 20 students were chosen for the qualitative interviews. The selection criteria include representation from different academic disciplines and year groups to ensure a diverse sample.

#### Data Collection Instruments

Two standardized instruments will be used for data collection: the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) and the Academic Stress Inventory (ASI). The EIS measures various components of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The ASI assesses the levels of academic stress experienced by students, covering different stressors such as exams, assignments, and time management.

#### Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analyzed using statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. These techniques will help identify the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress, as well as the specific components of emotional intelligence that are most strongly associated with lower levels of academic stress. Qualitative data from the interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns in students' experiences and coping strategies.

## Major Findings

### 1. Emotional Intelligence Levels among Students

The study found varying levels of emotional intelligence among students at Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women University. On average, students demonstrated moderate levels of emotional intelligence, with notable strengths in empathy and social skills. However, self-awareness and self-regulation were areas where many students showed room for improvement.

### 2. Academic Stress Levels

The data revealed that a significant proportion of students experience high levels of academic stress. Key stressors included exam pressures, assignment deadlines, and the overall competitive academic environment. Students reported symptoms such as anxiety, sleeplessness, and difficulty concentrating as common manifestations of their academic stress.

### 3. Correlation Between Emotional Intelligence and Academic Stress

A significant inverse correlation was found between emotional intelligence and academic stress ( $r = -0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that students with higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to experience lower levels of academic stress. This finding underscores the protective role of emotional intelligence in managing academic pressures.

### 4. Components of Emotional Intelligence and Their Impact on Stress

The study identified that specific components of emotional intelligence, namely self-regulation and self-awareness, had the strongest negative correlations with academic stress. Students who were better at recognizing and managing their emotions were less likely to feel overwhelmed by academic demands. Empathy and social skills, while important, showed a weaker but still significant relationship with academic stress levels.

### 5. Coping Strategies and Emotional Intelligence

Through qualitative interviews, it was found that students with high emotional intelligence employed more effective coping strategies compared to their peers with lower emotional intelligence. Common strategies included positive reframing, seeking social support, and proactive problem-solving. These students were also more likely to engage in activities that promoted their well-being, such as regular exercise, mindfulness practices, and maintaining a balanced lifestyle.

### 6. Impact of Academic Discipline and Year of Study

The study observed variations in emotional intelligence and academic stress levels across different academic disciplines and years of study. For instance, final-year students and those in highly competitive programs reported higher stress levels compared to first-year students and those in less competitive fields. However, students in their final year also showed higher levels of emotional intelligence, suggesting that these skills may develop over time with experience and maturity.

### 7. Gender Differences

While the primary focus was on a women's university, the study did include a small comparative analysis with male students from a neighboring institution. It was found that female students generally reported higher levels of empathy

and social skills, while male students exhibited slightly better self-regulation. However, the overall levels of academic stress were comparable between the two groups, highlighting that gender differences in emotional intelligence components might not translate directly into differences in stress levels.

### 8. Implications for Educational Practices

The findings suggest that integrating emotional intelligence training into the university curriculum could significantly benefit students. Programs aimed at enhancing self-awareness, self-regulation, and other EI components could help students manage academic stress more effectively. Additionally, the study highlights the need for comprehensive student support services that address both academic and emotional needs.

### 9. Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations can be made

- **Curriculum Development:** Incorporate modules on emotional intelligence and stress management into the university curriculum.
- **Workshops and Training:** Offer regular workshops and training sessions focused on developing emotional intelligence skills.
- **Counselling Services:** Enhance counseling services to provide support for students experiencing high levels of academic stress.
- **Peer Support Programs:** Establish peer support programs to foster a supportive community where students can share experiences and coping strategies.
- **Continuous Assessment:** Implement continuous assessment mechanisms to monitor students' stress levels and provide timely interventions.

### 10. Future Research Directions

The study opens avenues for future research, such as longitudinal studies to track the development of emotional intelligence over time and its long-term impact on academic and career success. Further research could also explore the role of cultural factors in shaping emotional intelligence and stress experiences among students.

### Conclusion

In Conclusion, this study underscores the critical role of emotional intelligence in managing academic stress among university students. By fostering emotional intelligence, educational institutions can create a more supportive and resilient student body, ultimately enhancing both academic performance and overall well-being.

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