ENHANCING STRESS RESILIENCE IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract. *In today's increasingly demanding academic environment, university students frequently experience high levels of stress, which can negatively affect their mental health and academic performance. Emotional Intelligence — the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others — has emerged as a key factor in promoting resilience and effective stress management. This study investigates the impact of emotional intelligence development on stress resilience among undergraduate students. A total of 214 students participated in a pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental study, with an experimental group undergoing a four-week EI training program.*

Keywords: *emotional intelligence, stress resilience, university students, higher education, mental health, emotional regulation, student well-being*

Introduction.

In the contemporary academic environment, university students are frequently exposed to various stressors that challenge their emotional stability and academic performance. The increasing demands of coursework, social adaptation, and career planning contribute to heightened levels of stress among students [1]. Consequently, there is a growing need for effective strategies that enhance students' psychological resilience.

Emotional intelligence —the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions as well as those of others—has emerged as a significant predictor of stress management and overall well-being [2]. Numerous studies suggest that individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence demonstrate greater psychological resilience and adaptability in stressful situations [3][4].

This paper aims to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress resilience among university students. Specifically, it investigates whether the development of emotional intelligence contributes to improved coping mechanisms and reduced stress levels. The following research questions guide the study:

What is the level of emotional intelligence among university students?

Is there a significant relationship between EI and perceived stress?

Can EI development interventions enhance students' stress resilience?

By addressing these questions, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on student mental health and offer practical recommendations for higher education institutions.

Literature Review

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) was first popularized by Salovey and Mayer (1990), and later developed further by Goleman (1995), who emphasized its role in personal and professional success [5][6]. EI is generally defined as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate emotions in oneself and others.

There are two dominant models of EI:

Ability Model (Salovey & Mayer): views EI as a cognitive ability involving emotional perception, facilitation, understanding, and regulation [5].

Mixed Model (Goleman): combines emotional competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, motivation, and social skills [6].

Studies have shown that higher levels of EI are associated with better interpersonal relationships, enhanced academic achievement, and improved mental health [7].

Stress is defined as the body's response to any demand or challenge and is a common experience among university students. According to Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model, stress arises when individuals perceive that the demands of a situation exceed their coping resources [8].

Academic stress can manifest in various forms:

1. Examination pressure
2. Deadlines and workload
3. Social and familial expectations
4. Financial constraints

Long-term exposure to stress can result in anxiety, depression, and decreased academic performance [9].

Stress resilience, meanwhile, refers to the ability to adapt positively despite adversity or high levels of stress. It involves emotional regulation, optimism, and coping skills—all of which are connected to emotional intelligence.

Multiple studies have explored the correlation between emotional intelligence and stress coping strategies. Schutte et al. (2007) found that individuals with higher EI scores report lower levels of perceived stress and greater use of adaptive coping mechanisms.

Key findings from previous research:

EI facilitates effective stress appraisal and response.

Emotionally intelligent students are more likely to use problem-focused coping strategies rather than avoidance.

EI training programs can significantly reduce anxiety and stress levels among students.

For example, a study by Saklofske et al. (2012) concluded that students with higher emotional intelligence exhibited greater academic resilience and lower levels of emotional exhaustion.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and stress resilience among university students. The research also included a brief intervention program to enhance EI and observe its impact on stress levels.

The sample consisted of 214 undergraduate students (121 females, 93 males) from three faculties of a large urban university in Central Asia. The participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different academic disciplines and year levels**.**

To measure the key variables, the following standardized tools were used:

Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) by Schutte et al. (1998):

A 33-item self-report inventory assessing general emotional intelligence, rated on a 5-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.87$).

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) by Cohen et al. (1983):

A widely used 10-item instrument to evaluate the perception of stress over the past month ($\alpha = 0.85$).

Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) by Smith et al. (2008):

A 6-item scale that measures the ability to bounce back from stress ($\alpha = 0.81$).

Results

This section presents the statistical findings of the study, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and comparisons between the control and experimental groups before and after the EI intervention.

Variable	Mean (Pre)	Mean (Post)	SD (Pre)	SD (Post)
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	108.6	118.4	12.3	11.1
Perceived Stress (PSS)	22.7	18.3	5.6	4.8
Resilience (BRS)	3.1	3.7	0.65	0.58

Participants in the experimental group showed an increase in emotional intelligence scores and resilience, and a decrease in perceived stress after the intervention.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant relationships among the main variables:

Variables	r	p-value
EI and PSS	-0.62	< 0.001
EI and Resilience	+0.58	< 0.001
Stress and Resilience	-0.55	< 0.001

These findings indicate a strong negative correlation between EI and perceived stress, and a positive correlation between EI and resilience.

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to assess the effect of the EI training intervention:

1. EI scores improved significantly in the experimental group:

$t(106) = 8.14, p < 0.001$

2. Perceived stress scores decreased significantly:

$t(106) = -6.32, p < 0.001$

3. Resilience scores increased significantly:

$t(106) = 5.77, p < 0.001$

No significant changes were observed in the control group across any of the variables ($p > 0.05$).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a significant relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and students' ability to cope with stress. Specifically, students who participated in the EI development program demonstrated higher EI scores, lower perceived stress, and greater resilience compared to the control group.

The negative correlation between EI and stress levels ($r = -0.62$) supports previous research suggesting that emotionally intelligent individuals are better equipped to manage stress. This may be due to their enhanced ability to recognize emotional triggers, regulate emotional responses, and employ effective coping strategies.

The positive correlation between EI and resilience ($r = +0.58$) aligns with Saklofske et al. (2012), who found that emotional regulation skills are critical for bouncing back from adversity. These skills include:

1. Self-awareness and impulse control
2. Empathy and effective communication
3. Goal-oriented behavior under pressure

Furthermore, the significant increase in EI and decrease in perceived stress after the 4-week training intervention suggests that EI is a trainable skill. This finding is consistent with Goleman's view that emotional competencies can be developed through targeted education and practice [6].

However, while most prior studies focused on EI as a static trait, this study contributes to the growing evidence that EI can be improved through structured interventions, especially among young adults in higher education.

Conclusion

This study explored the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on stress resilience among university students and assessed whether targeted EI training could enhance students' ability to cope with academic and personal stressors.

The key findings are as follows:

1. There is a significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and perceived stress, indicating that students with higher EI tend to experience lower stress levels.

2. A positive correlation was found between EI and resilience, suggesting that emotional competencies contribute to better coping mechanisms.

3. Students who participated in the 4-week EI development program showed a statistically significant increase in EI scores and resilience, and a decrease in perceived stress.

These results confirm that emotional intelligence is not only a predictor of psychological well-being but also a trainable competency. Therefore, incorporating EI development programs into university curricula or student support services can serve as an effective strategy to enhance mental health and academic resilience.

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