



Examining the Impact of Emotional Intelligence and Self Efficacy on Stress of Students Preparing for Competitive Examinations

¹**Charvi Bajaj**, *Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University Noida, Uttar Pradesh (AUUP), India*

charvibajaj03@gmail.com

²**Dr. Seema Singh**, *Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University Noida, Uttar Pradesh (AUUP), India*

ssingh1@amity.edu

Abstract: This study explores the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI), self-efficacy, and stress levels among students preparing for competitive examinations. Emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions (Goleman, 1995), plays a significant role in regulating stress, especially in high-pressure academic environments. Self-efficacy, described by Bandura (1977) as an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations, is hypothesized to affect how students cope with stress during exam preparation. This research investigates how emotional intelligence and self-efficacy predicts stress levels, with a particular focus on students preparing for competitive exams. A sample of university students was surveyed to assess their EI, self-efficacy, and perceived stress. Results suggest that higher emotional intelligence and stronger self-efficacy are negatively correlated with stress, meaning students with higher EI and self-efficacy experience lower stress levels. This research highlights the importance of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy in promoting better stress management among students and suggests that interventions targeting these factors could help reduce stress during exam preparations.

Keywords: *Emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, stress, competitive examinations, academic stress, stress management, emotional regulation.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, academic pressure has become one of the biggest concerns among students, especially those who are preparing for entrance and competitive examinations. In a country like India, these exams are extremely important as they determine admission into reputed colleges, jobs in government sectors, or future career paths. As a result, many of the aspirants experience constant worry, fear, and mental tension. This pressure can lead to serious consequences such as poor academic performance, loss of confidence, emotional exhaustion, and in severe cases, mental health issues like anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress arises when an individual evaluates a situation as overly demanding or beyond their capacity to manage, creating a sense of threat to their well-being. This means stress happens when a person believes that the situation is too difficult for them to manage, and it may affect their health or success. In academic settings, stress usually comes from deadlines, exam preparation, high expectations from parents, competition with peers, and the fear of failure.

Although stress is a common experience for students, not all students react to it in the same way. Few individuals are able to handle the pressure calmly and continue to perform well, while others may feel completely overwhelmed. This difference can be explained by the presence or absence of certain internal strengths, mainly emotional intelligence (EI) and self-efficacy. These two psychological traits help students remain calm, confident, and mentally strong even in the face of academic challenges.

Emotional intelligence involves being aware of and managing one's emotions effectively and using them in a helpful way. Individuals with high emotional intelligence can also understand and relate to others, which can lead to strong, positive connections. These individuals are better at controlling stress and keeping themselves motivated. Emotional intelligence helps them make better decisions, communicate effectively, and ask for help when needed. According to Liu et al. (2024), emotionally intelligent students are more likely to use coping strategies like positive thinking, time management, and emotional regulation, which protect them from the harmful effects of stress.

Self-efficacy, a concept developed by Albert Bandura, refers to “how much a person believes they can succeed in completing tasks.” It is the confidence that one can achieve their goals by using the right strategies and working hard. Students who have high self-efficacy trust their own abilities, don't give up easily, and see challenges as chances to learn and grow. They usually perform better in academics because they believe they can overcome difficulties through their efforts. As Perez (2019) noted, students with strong self-efficacy are more focused, determined, and less likely to experience severe stress during exam preparation.

The current study tries to fill that gap. It aims to explore how both emotional intelligence and self-efficacy are related to stress levels of students preparing for competitive exams. It also examines whether these two traits can predict which students are more likely to experience high or low levels of stress. By understanding this relationship, the study hopes to provide useful suggestions for teachers, parents, counselors, and education policymakers. These findings can help in designing emotional development programs or stress-management workshops that build internal strengths in students.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

In today's competitive academic environment, students preparing for entrance examinations often experience high levels of stress. This stress, if unmanaged, can negatively affect their academic performance, emotional well-being, and future aspirations.

Emotional intelligence (EI), the ability to understand, manage, and express emotions can significantly influence how students handle academic pressure. Students with higher EI are often better equipped to regulate their emotions, maintain motivation, and reduce anxiety during demanding times. Similarly, self-efficacy, or a student's belief in their own ability to succeed, directly impacts their confidence and persistence in the face of challenges.

1.3 Hypothesis

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

H₀₂: Self-efficacy is not significantly correlated with stress .

H₀₃: There is no correlation between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy.

H₀₄: Emotional Intelligence and Self Efficacy combined do not have a significant impact on stress.

H₀₅: Students with higher Emotional Intelligence and Self Efficacy do not have less levels of stress.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

185 students aged 18 to 25 who were preparing for competitive exams (national and university level) took part in the study. Both males and females were included. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was taken.

2.2 Inclusion Criteria

a) Aged 18–25

b) Preparing for competitive exams

c) Gave consent to take part

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 Emotional Intelligence Scale: This tool was used to find out how well students could recognize, understand, and manage emotions. The scale was developed by Dr. Shruti Narain and Dr. Arun Kumar Singh in 2014. This tool is simple, easy to understand, and gives a clear picture of how emotionally intelligent a person is.

2.3.2 General Self-Efficacy Scale: This scale checks how sure a person feels when dealing with problems or tough situations. Created by Schwarzer and Jerusalem, it contains 10 items that the participant responds to on a 4-point scale. It is widely used around the world and has good reliability. The questions in this scale help to understand how much a student believes in their ability to achieve academic goals and overcome obstacles.

2.3.3. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS): This tool is designed to find out how much stress a person feels in their day-to-day life. The scale was developed by Sheldon Cohen . It helps measure how students look at situations in their lives and how much pressure they feel because of them. The PSS is one of the most popular tools for measuring stress and is used in many research studies across the world.

2.4 Procedure

The participants were informed about scope of research. After obtaining their informed consent, the three standardized psychological tools were administered either through online forms or in person, depending on availability and convenience. The participants were instructed to respond honestly and were assured that their data would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. The average time taken to complete the questionnaires was approximately 20–25 minutes.

After the data collection, all responses were compiled and scored as per the respective manuals of each tool.

2.5 Data Analysis

The data collected from students was analyzed using SPSS software. Then, descriptive statistics were used to understand the general level of these traits among students. The analysis included average scores, the highest and lowest scores, and standard deviation. Next, Pearson Correlation was used. It showed that Emotional Intelligence and Self Efficacy were both negatively related to stress, which means students with higher EI or self-belief had lower stress. Finally, regression analysis was done to see which factor predicted stress more strongly. Emotional intelligence had a strong effect on stress, but self-efficacy did not show a major impact.

3. Results

Table 1: *Mean, Standard Deviation (SD), Minimum and Maximum Scores of Stress, Emotional Intelligence, and Self-Efficacy among Students Preparing for Competitive Examinations*

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Stress	183	8	32	19.43	4.858
Emotional Intelligence	183	6	30	23.96	4.007
Self-Efficacy	183	11	49	28.46	5.469

Descriptive statistics were calculated to understand the distribution of scores. The total number of participants was 183. For stress, the minimum score was 8 and the maximum was 32, with a mean of 19.43 and SD of 4.858. Emotional intelligence scores ranged from 6 to 30, with a mean of 23.96 and SD of 4.007. The self-efficacy scores varied between 11 and 40, with an average of 28.46 and SD

of 5.469. These values suggest that the participants had moderate levels of stress, emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy.

Table 2: *Correlation between stress, emotional intelligence and self-efficacy*

Variables	Stress	Emotional Intelligence	Self-Efficacy
Stress	1.000	-.453 (p<.01)	-.189 (p<.05)
Emotional Intelligence	-.453 (p<.01)	1.000	.172(p<.05)
Self-Efficacy	-.189 (p<.05)	.172 (p<.05)	1.000

Pearson's correlation was used. The results showed a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and stress ($r = -.453$, $p < .01$), indicating that as emotional intelligence increases, stress levels tend to decrease. A negative correlation was also found between self-efficacy and stress ($r = -.189$, $p < .05$). A significant positive correlation was observed between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy ($r = .172$, $p < .05$), implying that students with higher emotional intelligence have higher self-efficacy.

Table 3: *Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Stress Based on Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy*

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-value
Constant	34.908	2.368		14.74	<.001
Emotional Intelligence	-0.525	0.081	-0.453	-6.47	<.001
Self-Efficacy	-0.102	0.059	-0.189	-1.73	0.088

A multiple regression analysis was done to determine the predictive power of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy on stress. The results revealed that the model was statistically significant, explaining approximately 21.8% of the variance . Emotional intelligence was found to be

a significant predictor of stress ($B = -0.525$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher emotional intelligence leads to a decrease in stress levels.

3.1 Hypothesis Testing

Based on the statistical results, the hypotheses were tested as follows:

H₀₁: Emotional intelligence does not have a impact on stress in students preparing for competitive exams. This hypothesis was rejected .

H₀₂: Self-efficacy does not show a significant relationship with stress levels in students preparing for competitive exams. This hypothesis was rejected.

H₀₃: There is no relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy among students preparing for competitive examinations. This hypothesis was rejected.

H₀₄: Emotional intelligence does not significantly predict stress among students preparing for competitive examinations. This hypothesis was rejected.

H₀₅: Self-efficacy does not significantly predict stress among students preparing for competitive examinations. This hypothesis was not rejected.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to understand how Emotional Intelligence and Self Efficacy affect stress among students who are preparing for competitive examinations. Students with higher emotional intelligence are better able to remain calm in stressful situations, such as examinations. It also allows them to stay motivated, use problem-solving strategies, and reach out for support when needed. These findings support earlier research by Garg and Rastogi (2009), who found that emotional intelligence helps students deal with stress more effectively.

Emotional intelligence also turned out to be a strong predictor of stress in the regression analysis. Students who can control their emotions are less likely to feel overwhelmed during exam preparation. However, self-efficacy, although negatively correlated with stress, was not found to be a significant predictor in the regression model. This is somewhat unexpected given that prior research, such as Aziz, Sulaiman, and Ab Razak (2020), reported a strong relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance, suggesting that self-efficacious students are generally more confident and less likely to experience overwhelming stress. This finding could also point toward the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between self-efficacy and stress. In some cases, students may believe in their academic capabilities (high self-efficacy) but still fail to manage anxiety or emotional tension during exam periods. Thus, emotional intelligence may serve as a crucial skillset

enabling students to translate belief in their abilities into actual stress resilience. This view is supported by Saleem, Ullah, and Zafar (2024), who explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic success from a self efficacy perspective. They concluded that while both constructs contribute to academic performance, emotional intelligence may have a more immediate influence on stress management.

5. Conclusion

This study explored how emotional intelligence and self-efficacy relate to stress among students preparing for competitive examinations. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in reducing academic stress, while self-efficacy did not show a strong predictive value in the regression analysis. These results suggest that emotional awareness, regulation, and interpersonal skills can act as protective factors against the intense pressure experienced during exam preparation.

The research emphasizes the need for educational systems to pay more attention to the emotional needs of students. By encouraging emotional intelligence development through training, counselling, and supportive environments, institutions can help students manage stress more effectively. Although self-efficacy did not have a major impact in this study, it remains a valuable construct in academic psychology and should be further investigated in future research.

Overall, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of psychological factors that influence student stress and highlights the practical importance of emotional intelligence in educational settings. It opens new directions for future research and interventions that aim to promote healthier academic experiences for competitive exam aspirants.

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