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## Emotional Intelligence as A Predictor of Academic Stress Management among Undergraduate Students

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### ABSTRACT

The study investigates emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic stress management among undergraduate students. A descriptive research design was used. Two purposes and two research hypotheses guided the study. The target population was all the undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education. Purposive sampling was used to select two Departments and 100 participants were selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Two different instruments were adapted for data collection titled Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) and Student Academic Stress Scale (SASS). A pilot study of 25 undergraduate students was used to test-retest within three weeks intervals to test its reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha for Internal Consistency Reliability was 0.78 and 0.85, respectively. Data collected were analyzed using percentages, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Statistics (PPMS), and a t-test statistical tool to test null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance were used. The study discovers that there is a significant gender difference in academic stress management between male and female undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. The result shows that there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress management among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. The study concludes that emotional intelligence has a significant relationship with academic stress management among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is essential to a person's future success because students' academic performance is crucial in achieving their professional or vocational goals (Hasan *et al.*, 2022). Alagarsami (2022) noted that while students make efforts to pursue education, it is necessary to face difficulties known as stress because students and young people are the ones who would rule the country in the future. Stress is the body's non-specific reaction to demands placed on it or to upsetting occurrences in the environment (Alsulami *et al.*, 2020).

Similarly, Reddy *et al.* (2022) stated that stress is a normal component of academic life for students because of the many internal and external demands they must meet. Wilks (2015) defines academic stress as the body's reaction to pressures associated with schoolwork that are more than what students' capacity for adaptation can handle. According to Alsulami *et al.* (2020), between 10 and 30% of students report feeling stressed out about their academics at some point in their academic careers.

Students in academic environments may experience academic pressure, unrealistic ambitions, high expectations and competitiveness which are common sources of stress and anxiety (Wasserman & Wasserman, 2012). Academic stress arises from different sources; from home, school, environment, coursemates and financial burden. It could also result from biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and psycho-emotions among others which could continue to affect students in the school setting and even outside the school environment.

The risk factors associated with academic stress include forgetfulness of what has been studied, financial problems, social issues, and fear of examination or tests (Yousif *et al.*, 2022). Hasan *et al.* (2022) noted that academic stressors are everywhere including school, homes, friends, and the environment. The system of education further contributes to increased stress levels experienced by students in the form of overcrowded lecture halls, semester grading system, inadequate resources and facilities, the vastness of syllabus (Agrawal & Chahar, 2007), long hours and expectations of rote learning (Deb *et al.*, 2015). The dread of failure that impairs children's self-esteem and confidence is persistently ingrained in them by parents and institutions. Increasing expectations were listed as one of the reasons contributing to students' increasing stress levels.

University students who perform poorly academically experience stress, sadness, and anxiety. Academic stress was the single biggest health barrier to college students' academic achievement. 32% of the 97,357 college students who took part in the study claimed that academic stress has led to a failed assignment, a discontinued class, or a poorer grade. Researchers have suggested a variety of stress management interventions to address the problems of academic stress among students for them to achieve a high level of academic performance and manage the tension that comes with the effort to be educated. Academic stress has negative physiological and sociological effects, which include reduced academic achievement, decreased motivation, an increased risk of dropping out, a lack of understanding of some course concepts, a lack of interest in attending lectures, and sleep disturbances and depression (Hasan *et al.*, 2022; Pascoe *et al.*, 2020; Zhang *et al.*, 2022; Cui *et al.*, 2021).

A way to mitigate the negative effects of the stress that comes along with academic activity is to develop emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the capacity for both self- and other-awareness and comprehension of emotions. For learners at all academic levels, it serves as a critical predictor of academic achievement (Rehana, 2018). Emotional intelligence is concerned with self-control, interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, empathy, social skills, self-management, and teamwork; students who have high emotional intelligence are

innovative and successful (Rehana, 2018). According to Yousif *et al* (2022), maintaining some kind of control over events and praying are the two most popular ways to deal with academic stress. Emotional intelligence is to regulate and identify emotions and exhibits the aptitude to manage emotions and harness emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1995). Emotional intelligence is the set of skills, which permit individuals to make use of motions to adapt, perceive, understand, and control moods and utilize emotional information to enhance cognitive resources (Lavalekar *et al.*, 2005). Clarke (2010) stated that emotional intelligence is positively linked with self-control, empathy, motivation, life satisfaction, and openness to feelings.

Rehana (2018) noted that students differ in terms of emotional intelligence as well as academic stress and that male university students experience a higher level of emotional intelligence than academic stress while female university students have a higher level of academic stress than emotional intelligence.

Zarch *et al* (2014) finding shows the component of emotional intelligence general mood which has the most predictive value on stress intelligence. People with higher levels of emotional intelligence achieve more positive educational attainment. Participants with higher emotional quality were more stress-resistant and better decision formulators. If an individual's emotional intelligence increases, his ability to cope with stress increases as well.

Morgal *et al* (2016) conclude that students' use of emotions intelligently wards off stress in them. Steven *et al* (2019) results indicate a moderate inverse relationship between trait-emotional intelligence and perceived academic stress among participants. The correlation between individuals' levels of emotional intelligence and their impact on post-secondary academic achievement and concluded emotional intelligence was not directly related to academic achievement. The present study examined emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic stress management among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

Previous studies focused on the impact of emotional intelligence on academic success and achievement. None of the studies were carried out on emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic stress management. This survey study examined emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic stress management among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. Academic stress is a common occurrence among learners, especially undergraduate students. It is capable to distract and disrupt students to achieve academic excellence in their chosen career.

There are many consequences of academic stressors for students among which are failing courses, poor concentration, depression, low self-concept, and self-esteem, decrease motivation, examination stress, lack of understanding of some course concepts, not being interested in attending lectures, and dropping out of the school. It can also result in physiological and psychological such as anxiety, behavioral issues, depression, sleep disturbances and irritability, suicidal ideation, and even death among undergraduate students.

Alagarsami (2022) posits that every year about 25,000 students between 18-20 years commit suicide because of examination and other academic stress. It was against this background; the present study investigated emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic stress management among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

The purposes of the study are the following:

- (i) To explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress among undergraduate students at Alhikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.
- (ii) To find out difference in the academic stress management between male and female undergraduate students at Alhikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses are the following:

- (i) Ho1: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.
- (ii) Ho2: There is no significant difference in academic stress between male and female undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

## 2. METHODS

The study examined emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic stress management among undergraduate students. A descriptive research design of correlational type was used. The target population was all undergraduate students. The sample was 120 participants selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. A purposive sampling was used to select two Departments; the Department of Educational Management and Counselling, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. Two different instruments were adapted for data collection in this study; the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) originally developed by Dr Ekta but revised by [Srivastava et al \(2011\)](#) was used. Four domains of Emotional intelligence were selected viz Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness and Social-Skills and these were included for domains of the scale.

The instrument consists of 25 items, 5 items for each domain of intelligence. The items were reduced to 27 based on expert consensus and based on the frequency of endorsement by expert reviews. It was followed by a pilot study of 25 undergraduates using a test-retest with three weeks intervals to test its reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha for Internal Consistency Reliability was 0.78. The second instrument was Student Academic Stress Scale (SASS).

Academic stress experienced by undergraduate students is assessed using Student Academic Stress Scale developed. This scale consists of ten sections A-J with 130 items in all. In this part, Section A-F contains an item that deals with academic stress while Section G-F consists of items that deals with reaction to stressors. SASS is a 5-point Likert Type of the rating scale: 5- very much like me, 4- like me, 3- sometimes like me, 2-unlike me, and 1-very much unlike me. At the end of each section, there is a space for total scores. All 130 items are either rated by the respondents in increasing order of magnitude (4 and 5) or decreasing order of magnitude (2 and 1).

The higher the overall scores, the more stressful an individual is concerning academic work. The lower and higher overall score indicates a moderate level of academic stress. Also, a lower level in the overall score in reaction to stressors indicates that respondents are mild in their reaction to stressors. Data collected were analyzed using percentages, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and t-test statistical tools to test null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance were used.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Research hypotheses one temperature

**Table 1** revealed a significant relationship between the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress management among undergraduate students (14.53; 1.30)

and (12.60; 0.59). It was also confirmed from the table that there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress management among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria ( $r_{cal} = 0.32, <p0.05$ ). The table shows that emotional intelligence has a positive relationship with academic stress management among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

**Table 1.** Relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress management among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

Variable	N	df.	X	Std.	r.cal.	Sig.
Emotional Intelligence	120	118	16.8380	1.5702	0.32	0.000
Academic Stress			13.6203	1.8104		

The relationship is significant at  $r$ -value  $0.32 < p. 0.05$ .

### 3.2 Research hypotheses two

**Table 2** revealed that there was no significant difference in academic stress management between male and female undergraduate students (10.70; 1.50) and (7.60; 1.73) respectively. The table also revealed that there was a significant difference in academic stress management between male and female undergraduate students ( $t_{cal} = 0.20, <p= 0.05$ ). This implies that there is a significant gender difference in academic stress management between male and female undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. In the two groups; male undergraduate students were able to manage stress better than their female counterparts.

**Table 2.** The t-test on the difference in academic stress management between male and female undergraduate students in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

Variable	N	Mean	Std.	t-cal	Df.	p.value	Decision
Male	65	10.7021	1.5013	0.20	1	0.000	Significant
Female	55	7.6021	1.7301				

significant at  $0.20 < p. 0.05$

The study found that there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress management among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. The implication is that self-awareness helps them in attaining a high level of emotional intelligence which is understanding and knowing oneself. Emotional intelligence is to regulate and identify emotions and exhibits aptitude to manage emotions and harness emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1995). Rehana (2018) posits that it is an important predictor of academic success for students at every stage of education. However, this finding went in contrary to the submission of Yousif et al (2022) that the most commonly used approach to deal with academic stress was prayers and maintenance of some control over situations.

The study discovers that there is a significant gender difference in academic stress management between male and female undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. This finding suggests that different management strategies were employed by male and female students in tackling academic stress experienced in school. This finding correlates with Rehana (2018) results indicating that students differ in terms of emotional intelligence as well as academic stress and that male university students experience higher levels of emotional intelligence than academic stress, while female university students have

higher levels of academic stress than emotional intelligence. The result of hypothesis two indicates male undergraduate students were able to groups manages academic stress better than females. This may be due to male students' ability to cope with stressful situations, control themselves, and sometimes share their feelings unlike female students who cannot cope with stress they usually give up on challenges.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence can be a valuable asset for undergraduate students seeking to manage their academic stress and achieve academic success. Based on the study, emotional intelligence can play a protective role in mitigating the negative effects of stress on academic performance. Students with higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to have better coping strategies for managing stress and are less likely to experience burnout and other negative effects of stress on their mental and physical health. This study has shown that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of academic stress management among undergraduate students of Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. The findings suggest that emotional intelligence should be considered a critical factor in the development of interventions aimed at reducing academic stress among university students. Additionally, the results highlight the importance of emotional intelligence training for university students as a way of enhancing their ability to manage academic stress effectively. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) University management should recruit more professional counselors for the guidance and counseling unit to see to the need of undergraduate students who undergo stress in their academic pursuits.
- (ii) Undergraduate students that experience academic stress should visit the counselling unit for urgent attention and intervention from professional counsellors using emotional intelligence approaches like self-awareness, self-regulation and social skills.

#### 5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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