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Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance among Nursing University Students

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ABSTRACT

Background: Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a noteworthy part in a person's academic, professional success. Students' academic performance is a crucial goal in developing educational programs. **Objectives:** The current study examined the Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance among Nursing University Students. **Methods:** A cross-sectional design was used. All registered four-year undergraduate nursing students of the faculty of nursing at Badr University in Cairo were included. Schutte's Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) (1998) was used. **Results:** The findings indicated no statistically significant association between emotional intelligence and variables such as gender or students' place of residence. However, a statistically significant correlation was observed between EI and both general health status and Grade Point Average of the students. This suggests that improved general health may enhance the positive impact of EI on academic performance. **Conclusion:** The study recommends that EI training be embedded within nursing curricula, adopting an interdisciplinary approach to encourage the development of emotional competencies across college communities. It further suggests that educational institutions actively promote the cultivation of emotional skills such as emotional regulation and application through various academic activities, seminars, and workshops. This approach could substantially improve the quality of nursing education and enhance the competence of future nursing professionals.

Keywords: Academic Performance; Emotional Intelligence; Nursing Student

INTRODUCTION

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has increasingly garnered attention across various academic disciplines, with a notable focus on its implications within the field of nursing. Recent studies underscore that EI plays a pivotal role in shaping personality traits by enhancing mental health and fostering effective interpersonal relationships, which in turn contribute to elevated job satisfaction and academic performance (Gkintoni *et al.*, 2023). Despite the frequent underestimation of the impact of emotional dynamics, individuals with heightened EI are posited to exhibit superior capabilities in managing their personal and professional environments. While traditional notions of intelligence typically pertain to cognitive learning and application, EI is specifically defined as the capacity to understand oneself and leverage this understanding to navigate one's surroundings effectively. Consequently, EI has emerged as a critical component of nursing education (Ayeni *et al*., 2024; Ibrahim *et al*., 2017).

Initially conceptualised by psychologists Salovey and Mayer in 1990, EI is characterised as "the ability to competently process emotion-laden information and utilise it to guide cognitive behaviour in problem-solving". This construct encompasses an individual's ability to both recognise and regulate their own emotions, as well as to interpret and respond to the emotions of others. Additionally, EI includes competencies related to motivation, creativity, and optimal task performance (Belay & Kassie, 2021). The relevance of EI in nursing education is underscored by its essential role in providing high-quality, competent patient care.

The recognition of EI as a vital attribute for nursing students, educators, and practitioners has intensified, given its implications for managing responses to both internal and external stimuli. Ançel, Simpson and Gökmen (2022) highlight the significance of EI in ensuring quality care within the nursing profession,

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asserting that proficiency in EI is indispensable. Investigating the correlation between academic performance and EI development among Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students is crucial, as it may inform the design of educational strategies. Bennington (2019) emphasises EI's substantial role in facilitating effective communication and interactions among healthcare practitioners, clients, and colleagues. Therefore, integrating EI into nursing curricula is vital, as it enhances both theoretical knowledge and practical application, thereby contributing to overall care competence. A comprehensive understanding of EI's role within nursing education is essential for advancing the field.

Transitioning from nursing education to professional practice often necessitates passing standardised examinations. A thorough comprehension of EI and its interaction with sociodemographic factors affecting academic performance can assist educators in crafting curricula and providing resources to support nursing students in their examination preparation (Gold, 2023). Although Gold's study identifies correlations between EI, socio-demographic variables, and academic performance, it concludes that no predictive variables were significantly associated with academic performance as measured by GPA. Nevertheless, these findings contribute to the broader knowledge base and support existing theoretical frameworks in this domain. Cultivating EI skills and traits, such as leadership, ethical behaviour, and reflective practice, can enhance student performance and job satisfaction, thereby potentially reducing training costs for employers and alleviating financial burdens on the healthcare system (Bennington, 2019).

Nursing students frequently encounter a high-stress educational environment characterised by unfamiliar practical training settings, extended training periods, and interactions with a diverse range of individuals, including patients and healthcare teams (Hägg-Martinell *et al*., 2024). Research indicates that elevated levels of EI are associated with reduced stress and improved coping mechanisms among students and healthcare professionals. The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (SSREI), derived from Salovey and Mayer's (1990) EI framework, is commonly employed in this research due to its reliability, validity, brevity, and accessibility. The SSREI assesses EI through three primary components: the appraisal and expression of emotions, the regulation of emotions, and the application of emotional information in cognitive and behavioral contexts (Rodríguez-Leal *et al*., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The ability model of Emotional Intelligence (EI) encompasses four principal competencies: (a) utilising emotions to facilitate cognitive processes, (b) perceiving and articulating one's own emotions and recognising those of others, (c) managing emotions internally and in interpersonal interactions, and (d) understanding and effectively communicating emotions. These competencies-self-emotion appraisal, appraisal of others' emotions, emotional regulation, and emotional utilisation-collectively construct the multifaceted nature of EI, as operationalised by the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT). It is essential to acknowledge that no single component independently encapsulates the entirety of EI. Theoretically, EI can be envisioned as a hierarchical construct: self-emotion appraisal forms the foundational layer, succeeded by emotional regulation, followed by the appraisal of others' emotions, and ultimately culminating in the effective application of emotions to achieve optimal performance (Bennington, 2019). Empirical research demonstrates that nursing students with elevated levels of EI are better equipped to manage stressful situations, thereby enhancing their clinical training experiences and improving the quality of patient care they provide (Saikia *et al.*, 2024; Jones-Schenk, 2019; Sharon & Grinberg, 2018).

Significance of the Study

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a pivotal factor influencing academic performance, clinical practice, and the success of nursing students in passing the national licensure examination required for registered nurse certification. Elevated levels of EI correlate with enhanced performance on standardised examinations among nursing students. Despite the integration of EI-related content such as leadership development, interprofessional collaboration, healthcare outcomes, and patient-centred care within baccalaureate nursing curricula, there is a significant paucity of research examining the specific relationship between EI levels and academic performance within the context of academic settings. For nursing students to fully leverage the benefits of EI in their professional trajectories, it is imperative that they not only grasp the definition of EI but also attain a profound understanding of its theoretical concepts and apply these principles in practice

(Christianson, 2020; Sims *et al*., 2024).

Aim of the Study

The aim of the current study was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and academic performance among university nursing students.

METHODOLOGY

Design

A cross-sectional, descriptive design was employed in this study.

Research Questions

1. What are the significant differences in emotional intelligence based on sociodemographic variables?

2. How do variations in levels of emotional intelligence affect a student's cumulative GPA among nursing students?

3. Which emotional intelligence and sociodemographic variables are the most predictive of academic performance, as measured by GPA?

Setting and Sample

The study included all nursing students enrolled in a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSc Nursing) program at a private university in Cairo. So, participation in the study was voluntary, with oral consent obtained from all participants. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and nature. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and they had the right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. This study was conducted at all four levels of the School of Nursing, Badr University, Cairo, Egypt.

Data Collection

Data were collected through an online survey from late April 2024 to late May 2024. This approach was chosen to accommodate participants' preferences and convenience, ensuring a higher response rate and a comprehensive representation of the nursing student population. The Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) was translated into Arabic and tested for reliability and validity on a small sample. The survey was hosted on Google's platform, with the link sent via email or social media platforms like WhatsApp, providing participants with a unique link to access and complete the survey at their convenience.

Instrument

To achieve the study's aim, a tool consisting of two parts was used

Part 1: A self-report questionnaire on sociodemographic characteristics, including the student's grade level, age, gender, residence, father's education, mother's education, physical health, and grade point average (GPA) of different subjects related to emotional intelligence and cumulative GPA.

Part 2: The instrument used to measure EI was Schutte's Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), developed by Schutte *et al*. in 1998 and validated in Italy by Grazzani *et al*. (2009). It consists of 33 questions designed to assess characteristics or traits of emotional intelligence. The SSEIT measures four facets of EI: emotion perception, utilising emotions, managing emotions, and managing others' emotions. The scoring system uses a 5-point Likert scale, with a score of 1 representing strong disagreement and a score of 5 representing strong agreement. The questionnaire is a reliable scale for measuring individual personality traits in terms of psychometric properties due to its high internal consistency (Machia, Agnew & Arriaga, 2020; Alenezi *et al.*, 2024).

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 23. Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine means, frequencies, and percentages. Correlations and ANOVAs were used to explore associations between emotional

intelligence and academic performance among nursing students, as well as demographic characteristics.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers obtained ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Board of Badr University in Cairo, Egypt with reference number BUC-IACUC-240418-86 on 18th April 2024.

RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Student Study Sample (n=28)

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
17-20	287	54.4
<20-23	224	42.4
<23-26	16	3
<26	1	0.2
Range	17-26	
Gender		
Female	260	49.2
Male	268	50.8
Education		
Level 1	180	34.1
Level 2	146	27.7
Level 3	94	94
Level 4	108	108
Residence		
Town	289	54.7
Village	239	45.3
General Health		
Poor	10	1.9
Fairly good	170	32.2
Good	348	65.9
GPA		
Less 2.4	52	9.7
Equal 2.4	16	3
<2.4	467	87.3

Table 1 summarizes the sociodemographic characteristics of the study sample. It shows that most students were aged between 17 to 20 years, with about half of the sample being male. The majority of participants were in their first academic year, and most were from urban areas. Additionally, three-fourths of the participants reported having good general health, and the majority had a GPA higher than 2.4.

Table 2: T-test between Gender, Residence and Emotional Intelligence (n=28)

Variable			Mean	SD	*T*	*p*-value
Emotional Intelligence	**Gender**	Female	72.18	16.20	-0.19	0.85
		Male	72.44	15.83		
	Residence	Town	73.19	16.08	1.39	0.53
		Village	71.25	18.88		

Table 2 indicates that there were no statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence scores between genders. Similarly, there were no significant differences in the mean scores of subjects based on their place of residence.

Table 3: ANOVA between Education, Age, General Health, GPA and Emotional Intelligence (n=28)

Variable			Mean	SD	*F*	*p*-value
Emotional Intelligence	**Education**	Level1	73.14	17.66	0.52	0.67
		Level 2	71.03	14.25		
		Level 3	72.87	16.73		
		Level 4	72.19	14.71		
	Age	17-20	72.10	16.23		
		20-23	73.18	0.44	2.69	0.07
		23-26	63.68	0.36		
	General Health	Poor	68.20	25.37	21.27	0.001
		Fairly good	78.65	16.54		
		Good	69.31	14.49		
	GPA	Less 2.4	77.37	16.65		
		Equal 2.4	87.93	15.05	4.61	0.01
		>2.4	71.49	15.88		

Table 3 reveals that there were no statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence means according to academic level and age. However, it shows that variations in health conditions influenced the mean emotional intelligence scores, with higher EI observed among participants reporting fairly good general health. Additionally, the mean EI was higher among participants with a GPA of 2.4 or higher.

Table 4: Best Fitting Multiple Linear Regression Model for the Total Emotional Intelligence Score (n=28)

Items	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	*t*-test	*p*-value	95% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower	Upper
Education	-0.018	0.909	-0.001	-0.020	0.984	-1.66	2.01
Age	-0.436	1.787	-0.015	-0.244	0.807	-4.61	2.75
Gender	0.988	1.375	0.031	0.719	0.473	-1.69	3.71
Residence	-2.152	1.348	-0.067	-1.596	0.111	-4.86	0.44
General Health	-4.271	1.485	-0.138	-2.876	0.004	-7.19	-1.36
GPA	-3.327	1.123	-0.127	-2.963	0.003	-5.57	-1.16

r-square = 0.10m; Model ANOVA: F=8.16; p<0.001

Variables entered and excluded: Education, Age, Gender, Residence, General Health, GPA

Table 4 demonstrates that health status and GPA were among the most predictive variables of emotional intelligence, with a significant level of 0.01. In contrast, the predictive significance of education, age, and residence was not significant. Together, these variables contributed to explaining 10% of the variance in emotional intelligence.

DISCUSSION

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is widely acknowledged as a critical determinant of both academic and professional achievement (Rao & Komala, 2017). Conceptualised as a subset of social intelligence, EI encompasses the ability to perceive, comprehend, and manage one's own emotions as well as those of others, utilising this emotional awareness to regulate cognitive processes and behaviours effectively (Almansour, 2023). In professional domains such as healthcare, EI is particularly pivotal for ensuring safe and effective care delivery, as well as for enhancing overall service quality (Kaya, Şenyuva & Bodur, 2017). The current study sought to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance among university nursing students. Findings indicated that the majority of participants were aged between 17 and 20, with an almost equal gender distribution. Most of the participants reported good general health and a Grade Point Average (GPA) above 2.4. The *t*-test analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in EI based

on gender or residence, suggesting that these socio-demographic factors do not significantly affect EI among this cohort.

These findings contrast with those reported by Mokhlesi and Patil (2019), who identified significant differences in EI levels between rural and urban students in a study involving 100 secondary school children. Nevertheless, their research did not find any gender-based differences in EI across various dimensions, such as emotional identification, assimilation, understanding, and regulation. Conversely, Banerjee and Ghosh (2023) found that female students exhibited higher EI levels than their male counterparts in an Indian context. These discrepancies in findings may be attributed to cultural, educational, and environmental factors that uniquely shape the development of emotional intelligence. Such variations underscore the complexity of EI as a construct and emphasise the need for further empirical research to better elucidate the factors that influence EI development across different contexts.

The present study also identified a positive correlation between students' general health, emotional intelligence, and GPA. This finding is consistent with the work of Hussainy and Al Wahaibi (2023), who reported a significant correlation between academic performance, emotional intelligence, and GPA in a study conducted in Oman. The correlation may be interpreted in light of the theory that good general health enhances a student's capacity to manage emotions effectively, thereby exerting a positive influence on academic performance. Similar conclusions were drawn by Alvarez, Martos, and Extremera (2020), who also found a significant association between emotional intelligence and GPA. These results imply that fostering both physical health and emotional intelligence may serve as critical strategies for improving academic outcomes among students.

However, the findings of the current study diverge from those of Altwijri *et al*. (2021), who did not find a statistically significant association between emotional intelligence and academic success in their research conducted in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Their study observed that final-year students exhibited higher EI scores than those in earlier years, suggesting that emotional intelligence may develop progressively with academic experience. Furthermore, Almansour (2023) identified significant differences in EI levels based on a variety of factors, including age, gender, year of study, marital status, maternal educational background, physical and mental health, and GPA. These findings indicate that the development of EI is influenced by multiple factors and can vary considerably across different populations and educational settings.

The multiple linear regression analysis conducted in the present study highlighted general health and GPA as the most statistically significant predictors of emotional intelligence. A positive correlation was observed between EI, general health, and GPA, suggesting that students with better health conditions are more likely to possess superior emotional regulation skills, which, in turn, may motivate them to engage more effectively in their studies and achieve higher academic performance. This observation aligns with the conclusions of Ibrahim *et al*. (2017), who reported a positive association between emotional intelligence and academic performance in a cross-sectional study at King Abdulaziz University. Similarly, Wijekoon *et al*. (2017) noted that enhancing emotional skills could improve the academic performance of medical undergraduates at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences. However, Abera (2023) offered a different perspective, finding that emotional intelligence did not predict academic achievement in a study conducted at Wollo University. These divergent findings highlight the intricate nature of the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance, underscoring the necessity for more comprehensive and contextually varied research in this area.

Limitation

The current study has some limitations as the study should be applied to a large number of students, not just nursing faculty students. Also, the sample of the current study did not include internship students in the faculty of nursing, which may affect the significance of the study.

CONCLUSION

The study findings indicated that Emotional Intelligence (EI) was not significantly affected by gender or place of residence. However, a statistically significant relationship was found between EI and both general health and GPA, with these two factors emerging as the most significant predictors of EI. Students who

reported good general health had higher EI levels, and those with a GPA of 2.4 or higher also exhibited higher mean EI scores. Furthermore, this study suggests that more efforts be directed toward cultivating emotional abilities within educational environments to foster both personal and academic growth. Promoting emotional intelligence can significantly impact students' overall academic performance and well-being. Therefore, there is a need for further research in this relatively under-explored area to better understand the mechanisms through which emotional intelligence influences academic success.

The future scope of this study proposes integrating emotional intelligence (EI) training into nursing curricula using an interdisciplinary approach to foster emotional competencies within college communities. It also suggests that educational institutions promote the development of emotional skills, such as emotional regulation, through academic activities, seminars, and workshops. This approach could significantly enhance the quality of nursing education and improve the competence of future nursing professionals.

Recommendation

Based on these findings, it is recommended that emotional intelligence must be integrated as a core, interdisciplinary component of nursing curricula, holistically embedded within the educational framework. College communities should prioritise developing emotional skills, such as managing and utilising emotions, to enhance academic achievement through activities like seminars, workshops, and interactive learning. Teachers should foster active student engagement by incorporating enjoyable, teamwork-oriented activities that promote interaction between students and instructors. Further research is needed to explore how emotional intelligence influences academic success.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby confirm that they don't have any conflict of interest related to the manuscript.

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