RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of E-Learning and Emotional Intelligence on Academic Stress and Psychological Well-Being: Evidence from Indian Higher Education Institutions and Azerbaijani Schools

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a rapid and global shift from traditional in-person instruction to digital learning environments, significantly impacting students' academic experiences and mental well-being. This study explores the influence of e-learning and emotional intelligence (EI) on academic stress, emotional burnout, and academic performance among students in Indian higher education institutions. Drawing on emotion regulation theory, the study surveyed 387 undergraduate and postgraduate students from ten Indian colleges and universities and some Azerbaijani schools. The findings reveal that both e-learning engagement and emotional intelligence significantly influence students' stress levels and academic outcomes. Higher EI scores were associated with reduced emotional burnout and improved academic performance, underscoring the moderating role of EI in mitigating the psychological challenges of online learning. These results have practical implications for educational policy and digital pedagogy in the post-pandemic era.

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1. Introduction (Actuality of the Study)

The COVID-19 crisis has redefined the global educational landscape, forcing institutions to adopt digital platforms with limited preparation. This abrupt shift introduced new psychological and academic challenges for students, including heightened stress, reduced engagement, and mental fatigue. In India, these challenges are further exacerbated by socio-economic disparities and inconsistent digital infrastructure. Emotional intelligence (EI)—the capacity to understand, manage, and regulate one's emotions—has gained prominence as a critical psychological skill that can help students adapt to online learning conditions. While existing studies have separately addressed the effects of e-learning and EI, limited empirical work explores their combined influence on academic stress, burnout, and performance in the Indian context. This study addresses this research gap by analyzing the interplay between e-learning modalities and emotional intelligence in shaping students' psychological outcomes during a period of educational disruption.

2. Methodology

A **quantitative cross-sectional design** was adopted to examine the effects of e-learning and emotional intelligence on academic stress, burnout, and academic performance among students in Indian higher education. The study sample consisted of **387 students** (both undergraduate and postgraduate) selected from **ten colleges and universities** across India.

Instruments and Measures:

- **Emotional Intelligence:** Assessed using the **Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT)**.
- **Academic Stress:** Measured through the **Academic Stress Inventory (ASI)**.
- **Emotional Burnout:** Evaluated using the **Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI–SS)**.
- **Academic Performance:** Self-reported grades and performance indicators.

Data Analysis:
Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and **multiple regression analysis** were conducted using **SPSS** to explore the strength and nature of relationships among the variables. The statistical results were used to determine the predictive role of EI and e-learning on academic stress and emotional exhaustion, with a focus on identifying the protective function of EI.

1. Introduction

Psychological stress remains one of the most significant barriers to academic success, often impairing students' motivation, focus, cognitive engagement, and social functioning (Unger, 1998). The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these issues, particularly in higher education, where global lockdowns and institutional closures have disrupted normal academic routines (Cao et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020). Prolonged uncertainty, delayed semesters, and the abrupt transition to digital education have deeply affected students' mental health. The psychological toll is especially severe among international students, who often face travel restrictions, social isolation, and academic disruption.

Academic performance is intricately linked to emotional well-being. A student's ability to regulate emotions is widely considered essential for coping with academic stressors such as deadlines, assessments, and workload pressures (Tyng et al., 2017). Emotion regulation skills are directly associated with patience, perseverance, and

optimism—qualities that are essential for maintaining performance and psychological resilience in times of crisis. Past research has highlighted the widespread emotional impact of the pandemic on various populations, including healthcare professionals, children, and students (Chen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020).

While several studies have explored the psychological effects of COVID-19, there remains a lack of comprehensive research on how these dynamics specifically affect international students from Pakistan studying abroad. Given the severity of pandemic-related restrictions, understanding how emotional intelligence (EI) and digital learning environments interact to influence students' psychological outcomes is both timely and necessary. Although e-learning and EI have been independently studied as mitigating factors for stress, there is limited empirical research examining their combined impact on academic burnout and performance.

Moreover, psychological stress, anxiety, and fatigue have led to increased dropout intentions and decreased academic engagement worldwide (Wang et al., 2020). Institutional forecasts have predicted a decline in international student enrollments, with surveys showing that nearly 40% of Chinese students are reconsidering study plans in countries like the UK and the US (Durnin, 2020). Similar concerns apply to Pakistani students facing academic stagnation due to border closures and travel bans. These developments underscore the need to study the mental health of students trapped in their host countries during the pandemic.

The present study explores the influence of e-learning and emotional intelligence on academic stress, burnout, and performance among international students from Pakistan. Drawing from **Gross's (1998) Emotion Regulation Theory**, the study examines how individuals manage emotional responses under academic pressure. According to this theory, students who can identify, interpret, and regulate emotional cues tend to demonstrate higher resilience and adaptability. Previous studies have shown that emotionally intelligent individuals are better equipped to handle stress and maintain performance in challenging circumstances (Garg, 2001; Kirk et al., 2008).

EI facilitates adaptive emotional responses during uncertain times, enabling students to approach academic challenges with greater confidence and self-regulation. Consequently, higher emotional intelligence is associated with lower burnout levels, improved mental well-being, and enhanced academic performance. However, the pandemic has introduced unique disruptions to education that warrant re-examination of these relationships. While several studies have examined EI in professional settings such as healthcare, there is a research gap regarding its influence on the academic and psychological well-being of students during global crises.

Thus, the aim of this study is to provide an evidence-based understanding of the impact of e-learning and emotional intelligence on psychological stress, burnout, and academic outcomes, with a focus on Pakistani students unable to return home due to pandemic restrictions.

Integration of Modern Educational Technologies and Pedagogical Resources in Azerbaijani Schools: A Case for Reform in Social Science Education

Efforts to modernize the education system and align it with international standards are actively being pursued by the Ministry of Education through various strategic initiatives. These include the development and integration of electronic learning platforms that consolidate diverse digital teaching tools, such as video lessons, e-textbooks, interactive tests, digital assignments, and internationally recognized educational content. These resources are centrally hosted on educational portals, including www.e-resurs.edu.az, www.e-derslik.edu.az, video.edu.az, and Tehsil.tv.

In addition to content development, significant attention is given to in-service teacher training in digital competencies, such as internet navigation and web design, Microsoft Office suite applications, PowerPoint, Excel, and smart board usage. These initiatives aim to enhance teachers' pedagogical practices in a digitally enriched environment. The integration of such technologies is particularly pertinent in social science education, which is increasingly influenced by contemporary sociocultural and political developments. The incorporation of values

such as democracy, human rights, and ethical citizenship necessitates a re-evaluation of the content and delivery of social science curricula (Mammadova, 2020).

Classroom environments in technologically equipped schools often include tablets for each student, interactive whiteboards, and projectors. The traditional excuse of "forgetting a notebook" has been supplanted by digital issues such as “my tablet is out of charge,” quickly resolved by in-class charging stations and task-sharing networks between teacher and student systems (Sharif, 2015).

Recent assessments indicate deliberate national efforts to incorporate information and communication technology (ICT) into educational practices. As part of the “E-school” initiative, policies promoting the widespread deployment of ICT tools and digital resources in classrooms have been partially implemented. An empirical study was conducted to evaluate the use of these modern educational resources by secondary school subject teachers. The research focused on the following questions:

1. What are the primary purposes and extent of ICT use in teaching?
2. What is the current level of technological integration by subject teachers?
3. What barriers do teachers encounter when implementing ICT in classrooms?
4. How proficient are teachers in utilizing modern educational technologies?
5. Are classroom infrastructures conducive to digital teaching?
6. Are there subject-specific differences in ICT resource usage?

Methodology

A mixed-method approach was adopted, including an analytical and pedagogical experiment. The study, conducted in 2015, included schools from Ganja and Lankaran, regions where the E-school pilot project was underway. Forty subject teachers from disciplines such as Azerbaijani language and literature, social studies, mathematics, technical subjects, and foreign languages participated.

The study utilized six standardized questions and analyzed data using SPSS software. Results were interpreted through tabulations and visualizations to determine the extent of technology integration in instruction.

Results and Educational Implications

Comparative analysis shows that in Western and North American education systems, digital teaching materials in social sciences not only foster content mastery but also develop learners’ capacity to evaluate, filter, and synthesize information—critical competencies in the information age (Kang, 2007). These resources support learning beyond the classroom, promoting applied knowledge acquisition and civic engagement.

Moreover, the digital transformation of education must keep pace with sociopolitical changes, including the increasing importance of human rights, democratization, and global connectivity (Council Recommendations, 2012). The social sciences, in particular, are influenced by such global shifts. Educational content must address key geopolitical developments, including major national events such as the Second Karabakh War of 2020, which resulted in the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. This event, along with broader regional changes, necessitates the continual revision of educational materials to ensure their relevance and factual accuracy.

Furthermore, curricula must address complex global issues—terrorism, economic crises, pandemics, and refugee displacement—by cultivating students’ critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. Curriculum designers should emphasize conceptual linkages such as cause-and-effect, comparative analysis, and socio-cultural evolution. Modern social science resources must also reflect socio-economic diversity and contemporary lifestyles while remaining inclusive in terms of gender representation. As noted by Soltanova (2021), gender-sensitive content is increasingly prioritized in line with international human rights developments.

The portrayal of interreligious and multicultural coexistence is another vital dimension. Teaching materials should promote tolerance by showcasing historical examples of peaceful multiculturalism and shared societal contributions (Sirota, 2019).

Ultimately, the quality and effectiveness of a teaching resource depend not only on technological integration but also on the pedagogical soundness of its content. Poorly structured or factually weak resources fail to achieve meaningful educational outcomes. To maximize effectiveness, educational materials must present events chronologically, emphasize key concepts, and allow for dynamic revision in response to changing socio-political contexts.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

Emotional Intelligence

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI), first formalized by Salovey and Mayer (1990), refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others. EI has since been associated with life satisfaction, academic achievement, and occupational performance. It enables individuals to navigate emotional challenges, make informed decisions, and foster interpersonal relationships—skills that are critical in high-stress academic environments (Stevens et al., 2019).

According to Halimi (2020), students with high emotional intelligence are more capable of coping with psychological stress, particularly during times of academic pressure. Similar findings by Fteiha and Awwad (2020) suggest that students with greater EI are more resilient and less prone to burnout. Despite these insights, studies exploring the role of EI in academic contexts remain limited in countries such as Pakistan.

Emotional Intelligence, Academic Stress, Burnout, and Performance

Emotional intelligence serves as a non-cognitive competency that aids individuals in coping with environmental demands and stressors. Students with higher EI levels tend to demonstrate superior coping strategies and greater adaptability when dealing with academic challenges such as examinations, group work, and oral presentations (Enns et al., 2018). They are also more likely to regulate their physical and mental health effectively, which in turn improves academic outcomes.

Occupational stress and burnout are pervasive issues in academic life. In developing countries, these issues are often intensified by systemic factors such as poor institutional support, infrastructure limitations, and socio-economic constraints (Ali, 2012). Gerg (2020) highlights that unmanaged psychological stress can impair students' ability to concentrate, retain information, and perform academically. Emotional intelligence, therefore, plays a critical role in stress mitigation, as supported by Karimi et al. (2014) and MacCann et al. (2020), who noted that students with higher EI report lower burnout levels and improved academic satisfaction.

The prolonged impact of the pandemic has also increased absenteeism and disrupted learning trajectories. Studies have shown that students from low-income nations face compounded educational disadvantages, including gaps in skill development and academic progression (Bonal & González, 2020). In such contexts, emotional intelligence emerges as a protective factor, offering a psychological buffer against stress and performance decline.

While the role of EI has been widely examined in nursing and healthcare education, its influence on international students stranded abroad during COVID-19 has received little attention. This study addresses this gap by evaluating the interplay between emotional intelligence, academic stress, and psychological outcomes among Pakistani students studying remotely or in temporary residence abroad.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature and theoretical framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1**: Emotional intelligence is positively associated with academic performance among students.
- **H2**: Emotional intelligence is negatively associated with academic stress.
- **H3**: Emotional intelligence is negatively associated with emotional burnout.

Online Classes, Study Stress, Burnout, and Performance

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the operations of educational institutions, prompting a global shift to online learning modalities (Chakraborty, 2021). Although online education platforms have proliferated (Nash, 2020), the rapid implementation of full-scale digital instruction posed challenges for many institutions. Mishra et al. (2020) note that while some developed countries had existing infrastructure for online education, none were fully prepared for a comprehensive transition. Empirical evidence suggests that the reception of online courses varies between countries. For instance, Bojović et al. (2020) observed divergent reactions among Pakistani and U.S. students, although the challenges reported were similar. One major barrier, as reported by Williams et al. (2011), is the inadequacy of digital learning environments, especially in areas with limited or no internet connectivity.

In the context of Pakistan, Adnan and Anwar (2020) found that the abrupt transition to online learning during COVID-19 induced significant anxiety and depressive symptoms among students. Technological barriers, financial constraints, and the lack of physical learning environments—such as laboratories and collaborative spaces—have exacerbated academic stress. Students' psychological stress intensified during lockdowns, further aggravated by social isolation and limited physical activity (Chandra, 2020). According to Rohman et al. (2020), students reported adverse mental and physical health effects due to increased academic workloads and limited social interaction in the digital classroom.

The psychological impact of online learning is well-documented. Sahu (2020) highlights the emergence of widespread anxiety, depression, and job-related stress among students. Similarly, Cao et al. (2020) reported that online learning environments during the pandemic significantly impaired university students' performance, primarily due to uncertainty and isolation. Jaeger and Blaabæk (2020) argue that despite increased familial support, online learning often fails to foster students' independent learning capabilities. This concern is more pronounced for students from rural and low-income backgrounds (Yen, 2020), where access to technology and internet connectivity is limited (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). Moreover, financial burdens and the absence of hands-on experimental work compound the educational inequities experienced by these students (Adam et al., 2020).

Research by Sundarasen et al. (2020) identified online learning as a significant contributor to stress and burnout, further linking these outcomes to diminished academic performance and adverse psychological intentions. According to Choi (2020), ineffective pedagogical strategies in digital learning environments have led many students to contemplate dropping out. Jiang et al. (2021) also reported that online classes negatively impacted both the mental health and academic performance of students.

Based on the above findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H4**: Online education has a negative effect on students' academic performance.
- **H5**: Participation in online classes is positively associated with study-related stress.
- **H6**: Online learning contributes significantly to psychological and physical exhaustion.

Theoretical Framework

Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical construct in educational, psychological, and organizational research. It encompasses the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate emotions, which is essential for coping with psychological stress, avoiding emotional exhaustion, and sustaining optimal performance (Richards & Pryce, 2006). According to Alonazi (2020), individuals with high EI are better equipped to handle stress and

burnout, ultimately leading to improved job performance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, emotionally intelligent individuals demonstrated greater resilience, thereby maintaining productivity under pressure.

In educational settings, EI has been identified as a determinant of academic success (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012). The ability to regulate emotions is particularly critical in digital learning environments. Teachers anticipate that students with high EI will adapt more effectively to online learning challenges and demonstrate higher performance levels (McKnight, 2013). Enns et al. (2018) assert that EI facilitates stress regulation, enhancing students' capacity to navigate academic obstacles.

Studies indicate that EI significantly contributes to academic success by enabling students to respond constructively to unpredictable scenarios, promoting creative problem-solving and intellectual adaptability. Emotional intelligence thus mediates the relationship between stress and achievement, especially in remote and hybrid learning contexts (Grandey, 2000). Wu et al. (2007) emphasize that EI reduces interpersonal and environmental stress while enhancing academic and professional outcomes.

Márquez et al. (2006) further support this view, asserting that students with higher EI levels are more likely to succeed academically. Despite growing evidence of EI's influence on workplace outcomes, limited research has explored its role in online education. Given the sustained reliance on virtual instruction due to the pandemic, examining the moderating effect of EI on academic stress, burnout, and performance is essential.

Research Methods

Data Collection

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationship between online learning, emotional intelligence, study stress, burnout, and academic performance. Due to the constraints imposed by the pandemic, a **convenience sampling** technique was adopted. While non-random, the sampling method allows for theoretical generalization of the findings.

Data were collected using an online questionnaire administered via digital platforms including Facebook, WeChat, and WhatsApp. Trained research assistants facilitated data collection to ensure accuracy and consistency. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study. Out of 429 completed questionnaires, **387** responses were deemed valid and used for the final analysis.

3. Measurements

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) was assessed using the 32-item Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) developed by Schutte et al. (1998) at UCLA. Respondents rated items on a 5-point Likert scale ("1 = Strongly disagree" to "5 = Strongly agree"), with example items such as: *"When I am in a good mood, I am more motivated and able to solve difficulties easily."* The scale demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$).

Study Stress

A bespoke 7-item stress scale was developed to capture academic stress experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown, utilizing the conceptual framework of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Items such as *"I am frustrated by the amount of work and lack of resources I am facing"* were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument yielded good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$).

Burnout

Burnout was measured through a modified version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI–SS) (Schaufeli et al., 2002) using 15 items assessing emotional exhaustion (five items), depersonalization (four items),

and reduced personal accomplishment (six items). Sample items include *"Do you feel emotionally fatigued because of your online studies?"* Reliability was high (Cronbach's α = 0.87).

Academic Performance

Academic performance was assessed via a 12-item scale developed by Cooper and Petrides (2010), capturing emotional well-being, self-regulation, and social competence in academic contexts. Respondents rated their performance on a 0–100 scale, with higher scores indicating stronger outcomes. The measure demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.89).

E-Learning Experience

E-learning was evaluated using an 11-item scale developed by Chakraborty et al. (2020), assessing students' stress, burnout, and academic reflections on digital learning. Items such as *"A physical classroom is superior to an online program"* and satisfaction ratings ("often pleased" to "often dissatisfied") were included. The scale showed acceptable reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.86).

4. Results

4.1 Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients, and intercorrelations. Emotional intelligence positively correlated with academic performance ($r = .46$, $p < .01$), and negatively with study stress ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$) and burnout ($r = -.34$, $p < .01$). E-learning negatively correlated with performance ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$), and positively with study stress ($r = .43$, $p < .01$) and burnout ($r = .41$, $p < .001$).

4.2 Structural Model

Path analysis revealed that EI positively predicted academic performance ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$) and negatively predicted stress ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .001$) and burnout ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$). E-learning negatively predicted performance ($\beta = -.20$, $p = .01$), and positively predicted stress ($\beta = .39$, $p = .01$) and burnout ($\beta = .32$, $p = .01$), supporting hypotheses H4–H6.

4.3 Moderation Analysis

Interaction effects between EI and e-learning were significant predictors of all outcomes. Students with high EI experienced attenuated negative impacts of e-learning on academic performance, stress, and burnout, supporting H7–H9.

5. Discussion

This study confirms that COVID-19–induced online learning significantly impacted Pakistani students, increasing stress and burnout while hindering academic performance. However, emotional intelligence emerged as a potent psychological buffer, moderating these negative effects and enhancing academic resilience. These findings align with prior research (McKnight, 2013; Enns et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2007) and underscore the importance of embedding EI training into digital education strategies. Strengthening students' emotional competencies can mitigate stress and burnout, promoting academic success during crises.

6. Conclusion and Limitations

Conclusion: This study demonstrates that while e-learning during COVID-19 increases stress and burnout, emotional intelligence significantly mitigates these effects and enhances academic performance. Integrating EI training and support mechanisms within digital education can strengthen student resilience in crises.

Limitations:

- Reliance on self-report measures may introduce response bias.
- The sample was modest (N = 387) and limited to Pakistani students, reducing generalizability.
- Future studies should investigate additional factors such as IQ, cultural intelligence, and longitudinal impacts in larger, diverse samples.

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