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Emotional Intelligence and research stress among Postgraduate (M.Phil. /Ph.D.) Students at the university level: A correlational study

Abstract

*This study was designed to find out the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and research stress (RS) of M.Phil and Ph.D. scholars. The sample size was comprised of 200 (156 M.Phil. & 44 Ph.D.) research scholars. and data was collected through random sampling technique. Two research tools were employed; Schutte's Emotional Intelligence scale was used to measure the general EI of research students and the second tool was developed to explore the research stress of MPhil and Ph.D. students. A significant difference was found (t= -6.000, p= <.001) in the Emotional Intelligence scores of MPhil and Ph.D. scholars. Likewise a significant differences was also found (t= 9.990, p= <.001) in the research stress of MPhil and Ph.D. respondents. Furthermore a negative correlation (rho= **-.604**[**], p= <0.01) was found between Emotional Intelligence and Research Stress among research students. Thus, it is safe to conclude that higher levels of Research Stress (RS) is directly linked with the Lower levels of Emotional Intelligence (EI).***

Keywords: *Emotion, Intelligence, Research, Stress*

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Introduction

Various emotions such as enjoyment and interest in learning, anxiety, anger, stress, and boredom are experienced by students during their learning in tertiary education. In the modern era, personal success depends on the ability to understand the emotion of others and react accordingly. Salovey & Mayer, Schutte, Malouff,& Bhullar, (1990; 2009)believe that Emotional intelligence is the ability of controlling, managing and expressing people's emotions, including the ability to control and use emotions wisely. EI is not just a trait, but an ability, with 4 key characteristics (Susan Krauss Whltbourne, 2021).

For a long time, the People of Pakistan are facing emotional challenges. Pakistanis must be emotionally trained to be strong enough to face every challenge in life (Muteeb, 2020).In the past two decades, the concept of EI has been developed as a part of personal talent. Its development can not only solve many problems in theory and psychology, but also solve problems in health, education, and management. There are many research studies related to EI, many different ways and methods of measuring it, but experts and people generally realize that an individual is also shaped by something other than just the level of his intelligence in terms of understanding, abilities, making connections, etc. (Krulc, 2017, pp. 427). New concepts have begun to emerge with which we can assess individual people, but they have emerged from an emotional side that is, as many say, contrary to reason.

It is generally believed that a higher level of education requires students to study hard. This expectation puts students under stress and anxiety, which inhibits students'

practical ability to perform well in their academic careers. This level of stress is higher in the first year of his/her academic program. Most students drop out in the first year of their courses. The main reason for this kind of dropout is considered to be the high degree of stress and anxiety in the students. However, research shows that the first year of stress and coping with the stress are not indicators of student success in the final year. He can learn constructively during the course and forget to manage himself and his studies.

Postgraduate students must plan and organize their studies. Research and reading will be their responsibility. They must set their own goals and parameters, but there will be guidance and deadlines in the process to ensure they are on the right track. At the postgraduate level, they should acquire and demonstrate skills in critical analysis, inducting and deducting thinking, and logical reasoning. This is the next level when M.Phil. &Ph.D. are expected to contribute to knowledge. Pursing a postgraduate degree requires a very different attitude. A large number of students seen at the undergraduate level, who couldn't be disturbed at all, because they have to attend class and go for lectures, and regard social life as the only reason for going to university. As a postgraduate student, everyone lectures with enthusiasm, not gossip, they plan academic discussions.

Being a parent of a student is a dual-task. Courses studies, assessments, writing, meetings, workshops, and presentations need to be integrated with the operation of the nursery and the school run, play-dates, and weekend entertainment. Therefore, it takes time and commitment.

Managing high workloads, studying and writing late at night, living in a new city, and being away from family and friends can indirectly lead to stress. When the demand is greater than the ability to cope, there will be stress. When a person's burden exceeds his available assets stress will appear. If the stress is too high lasts for a long time, it will reduce academic performance, hinder students' ability to participate and enrich campus life, and increase the possibility of drug abuse and other potentially disruptive behaviors (Richlin-Klonsky & Hoe, 2003).

Coping with stress is a key factor that research students must overcome if they want to order to postgraduate successfully. Most intellectual students who can succeed in universities have difficulties with various non cognitive abilities like building a positive relationship, stress management skills, and making informed decisions. They may adopt dysfunctional coping styles which can weaken their academic and research efforts. Each of these issues can be described as a lack of EI. A better understanding of emotions and reactions to them will help managing stress. One of the social crises nowadays is the problem of stress and personal behavior. When a person cannot often succeed in his work, he will be in a stressful and maladaptive situation. Emotional intelligence as a tool can be effectively used to solve these problems and help individuals make adjustments in society. In recent years, companies, universities, and schools have seen great interest in emotional intelligence.Researchers and curriculum developers are being inspired by the idea of emotional intelligence to improve educational curricula. Building a person's EIwill affect a lifetime. Many parents and educators

are shocked by the increasing conflicts in school children.They are eager to necessary teach emotional intelligence skills to students.Agolla and Ongori(2009) believed that in recent years the education industry is pointed out of the least stressed industries, but due to fierce competition, it has become the most stressed industry.In the education industry students in colleges and universitiesare facing stressin various components. According toTalib andZai-ur-Rehman (2012), course load is a one factor of stress. Baldwin et al.(2009) viewed preparation for exams as the source of stress.Robotham (2008) said that project work is also a factor of stress and according to Frank Reema and Kodikal Rashmi (2019) research tendencies are major source of stress.

Doctorate (Ph.D.)is the highest degree of academic career, is a prestigious and respectful title.Therefore, doctoral students, have obtained the societal right to be called "Doctors" and they are the backbone of the research industry.In comparison, they can make more money on average, and are always admired and envied by people without a doctorate. Doctoral students are faced with a lot of challenges in the whole research process, and they have to give up a lot of hard work, a lot of tears, sweat, and even blood to jump out of the hurdles of graduate school!Masih & Gulrez(2006) opined that nowadays stress is understood as a lifestyle crisis that affects any individual, no matter what stage of developmentit is in (Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2016).Recently, it has been reported that the depression and anxiety rate of doctoral students worldwide is6 times higher than that in the general public (Evans et al., 2018).According

to the study of Mackie and Bates (2019), stress factors that contribute to Ph.D. students' are; supervisor relationshipproblems, lack of transparency in universities, role conflicts,workload,and economicinsecurity.

Literate Review

In recent decades, some authors believe that intelligence is understood as a factor of general intelligenceis incomplete.Therefore, new theories are promoting the broader perspective ofintelligence, whichtranscends pure rationality and includes aspects, such as emotionalfactors(Estrada.M et al., 2021). The better environmental conditions and satisfaction of the student'sneeds can improve the positive emotions and commitment (Hagenauer Gerda et. al, 2018).Our previous research (Kuk et al. 2015) also showed thatthe emotional intelligence and social skills in Polish sports students have improved.Today, we are all part of the era of globalization.The era of globalization is characterized by excellence, competition, and quality etc. Young people arecharacterized by stressful events and psychological challenges.The incidence of depression was also found in adolescents because it is related to the fear of failure, inability to concentrate and negative evaluation about the future (Busari, 2012).

When a person's burden exceeds his available assets, stress will appear.Globally,many studies have expressed deep concern about the stress in tertiary education.In some studies, men showed greater stress than women. However, compared with men, women experience greater stress in the field of interpersonal communication (Saxena et al., 2014).

Due to academic overload and group projects, there is widespread stress among students. This kind of stress caused by the academic environment is usuallycalled academic/research stress. According to the study of Teh et al. (2015) in Malaysia, the stress among undergraduates is widespread. They found that studying ahuge syllabus in a limited time and the idea of failing exams are the reasons for students'stress. In addition, according to the study of PozosRadillo et al. (2014), academic stress is related positively with the homework, exams, and lectures load.When a person deals with a situation that they consider irresistible and unmanageable, stress arises. Stress is a negative emotional experience related to biochemistry, physiology, cognition, and behavior. These changes occur when a person tries to manage or cope with stressors.We believe that stress is an inevitable joint in our lives,and it is equally valuable to everyone because, without stress, weare sleepy and easy-going creatures (Jassal. N, 2021)

According to the study of Habeeb (2015), there is apositive significantrelationship between EI and Stress.According to the study of Biryant(2015),students with higher EI levels experience lower stress.Miri et al., (2016) suggested that Emotional intelligence in different individuals can promote their success.Suleman et al., (2019) opined that the higher the level of EI, the higher the academic success rate. EI can predict the academic success of students and is closely related to high academic success.Moghal, Yasien, Alvi, & Washdev (2016) evaluated that the clever use of emotions by medical studentscan helprelieve stress. According to the research of Rehana (2016) students differ in terms of emotional intelligence and

stress. The male university students have a higher level of EI, while female university students have a higher level of stress. Students of public universities have higher EI whereas, private sector university students have higher stress. It is suggested that teachers ought to use appropriate strategies to the stress in students' life and teach them coping abilities to manage stress effectively. It is also recommended that university students may teach to enhance emotional intelligence skills to manage stress effectively.

Research Objectives

1. To know the Emotional Intelligence of researcher students.
2. To assess the stress of researcher students.
3. To find out the relationship between EI and research stress among research students.

Research Hypotheses

$H_o 1:$ There is no difference in the EI levels of the M.Phil. & Ph.D. students.

$H_o 2:$ There is no difference in the stress of the M.Phil.& Ph.D. students.

$H_o 3:$ There is no correlation between EI and Research Stress in researcher students.

The current study aims to determine the relationship between Emotional intelligence and Stress among postgraduate (MPhil & Ph.D.) students at the university level. This study will be helpful for higher education institutions to understand the psychological state of researcher students. Because of the importance of emotional

intelligence, this study has an area worthy of academic concern in the course, so institutions may design courses of EI to reduce academic and research stress of university students.These findings may inform the future strategies to enhance the students' experience while enrolled in M.Phil/Ph.D. degree at a tertiary institution.

Methodology

The Current study is descriptive in nature. The quantitative research method was applied in this study. A Survey technique was used to collect the data from research scholars of public and private universities.

Population

M.Phil. and Ph.D. students of public and private sector universities located at Karachi and Jamshoroare population of the study. Due to shortage of time it was not possible to obtain the data from the whole population. The data wascollected from 1 public and 1 private university. Data will be collected from those researchers who are enrolled and working on the research project.

Sampling

A random sampling technique was used for this study.The sample size was comprised of 200 research scholars (156 MPhil & 44 Ph.D.)from public and private sector universitiesof Sindh province.

Research Instrument

Five-point Likert Scales were used for measuring the emotional intelligence and research stress of scholars. Schutte's Emotional Intelligence scale was used to measure the general EI of participants. The Emotional Scale consisted of 4 factors and 33 items represent the Emotional Intelligence

model of Salovey & Mayer (1990). The Research Stress scale consisted of 5 factors and 37 items were used to measure the research stress of participants.

Pilot Study
Pilot testing was conducted on a sample of 30 respondents. Cronbach's Alpha score for the emotional intelligence scale was**(.886)**after deleting 5 items and for the research stress scale was**(.946)**after deleting 2 items. The final EI questionnaire consisted of 28 items and the research stress questionnaire 35 items.Overall alpha coefficient of the questionnaire; Emotional Intelligence and Research Stress was excellent.

Results and Discussion
After the collection of quantitative data, descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to obtain the results from given. SPSC software was used to analyze the data. Emotional Intelligence had been divided into four main components; perception of emotions, managing own emotions, managing own emotions, managing others' emotions, and utilization of emotions. EI tool was measured through 28 questions. Research Stress had been divided into five main factors, coursework stress, thesis writing stress, supervisor relationship stress, academic stress, and socioeconomic stress. The Research Stress tool was measured through 35 questions. These questions were scaled on the 5-point Likert scale from "1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree". The results are found as under:

Table 1

Emotional Intelligence (factor wise)

Factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perception of emotions	200	2.17	.451
Managing own emotions	200	2.31	.464
Managing others emotions	200	2.77	.580
Utilization of emotions	200	2.68	.704
Overall EI	200	2.44	.338

The above table represents the mean score and SD of four components of Emotional Intelligence. The mean score for the factor 'perception of emotions' was (M= 2.17) and the standard deviation was (SD= .451). The mean score for the factor 'managing own emotions' was (M= 2.31) and the standard deviation was (SD= .464). The mean score for the factor 'managing others' emotions' was (M= 2.77) and the standard deviation was (SD= .580).The mean score for the factor 'utilization of emotions' was (M= 2.68) and the standard deviation was (SD= .704).Finally, the overall mean score of 'Emotional Intelligence' was (M= 2.44) and standard deviation was (SD= .338) which shows the low level of emotional Intelligence of research students (M.Phil & Ph.D.).

Table 2
Research Stress (factor wise)

Factors of Research Stress	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Coursework stress	200	3.65	.671
Thesis writing stress	200	3.72	.537

Supervisor relationship stress	200	3.13	.766
Academic stress	200	3.69	.684
Socio economic stress	200	3.57	.579
Total	200	3.52	.412

The above table represents the mean score and SD of five components of Research Stress. The mean score for the factor 'Coursework stress' was (M= 3.65) and the standard deviation was (SD= .671).The mean score for the factor 'Thesis writing stress' was (M= 3.72) and the standard deviation was (SD= .537). The mean score for the factor 'Supervisor relationship stress' was (M= 3.13) and the standard deviation was (SD= .766). The mean score for the factor 'Academic stress' was (M= 3.69) and the standard deviation was (SD= .684). The mean score for the factor 'Socio-economic stress' was (M= 3.57) and the standard deviation was (SD= .579). The overall mean score of 'Research Stress' was (M= 3.52) and standard deviation was (SD= .412) which shows research students are facing stress during their MPhil and Ph.D. studies.

H₀ 1: There is no difference in the Emotional Intelligence levels of the M.Phil. & Ph.D. students.
To compare the emotional Intelligence for MPhil and PhD scholars, an independent samples t-test was conducted. Significant difference were found (*t*= -6.000, *p*= <.001) in the

scores with mean score for MPhil (*M*= 2.3590, *SD*= .27214) and PhD(*M*= 2.7338, *SD*= .38830). Hence $H_o 1$ was rejected.

Table 3

Means, Standard deviations, Standards error mean, and t-value showing differences in scores between Qualification (M.Phil & Ph.D.) and Emotional Intelligence (N=200)

Qualification		N	Mean	SD	SE M	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed
Emotio nal intellige nce	M.Phil.	156	2.3	.27214	.021 79	-6.00	.000
	Ph.D.	44	2.7	.38830	.058 54		

$H_o 2$: There is no difference in the stress of the M.Phil.& Ph.D. students.

To compare the research stress for MPhil and PhD scholars, an independent samples t-test was conducted. Significant differences were found (*t*= 9.990, *p*= <.001) in the scores with mean score for MPhil (*M*= 3.6198, *SD*= .40781) and PhD (*M*= 3.1844, *SD*= .19146). Hence $H_o 2$ was rejected.

Table 4. Means, Standard deviations, Standards error mean, and t-value showing differences in scores between Qualification (M.Phil & Ph.D.) and Research Stress (N=200)

Qualification		N	Mean	SD	SEM	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed
Researc	M.Phil.	156	3.6198	.40781	.0326		

h Stress					5	9.990	.000
	Ph.D.	44	3.1844	.19146	.02886		

H₀ 3:There is no correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Research stress in researcher students.

A correlation test was conducted to measure the correlation between the Emotional Intelligence and the Research Stress of MPhil and Ph.D. respondents. There wasa negative correlation (*rho*= **-.604**[**]) between the Emotional Intelligence and Research Stress of research scholars. The test statistic was significant at (*p*=0.01) which means that the differences are highly significant. Hence *H₀ 3* was rejected.

Correlations

		EI	RS
Emotional Intelligence	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	**-.604**[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	200	200
Research Stress	Correlation Coefficient	**-.604**[**]	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	200	200

[**]. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to measure the correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Research Stress of MPhil and Ph.D. students. The researcher assesses four components of Emotional Intelligence; perception of emotions, managing own emotion, managing others' emotions, utilization of emotions, and overall Emotional

Intelligence of research students. The mean score for the first-factor 'perception of emotions' was (M= 2.17) and the standard deviation was (SD= .451) which shows research students (M.Phil & Ph.D.) are low at perceiving emotions at the university level. The mean score for the second factor 'managing own emotions' was (M= 2.31) and the standard deviation was (SD= .464) which shows research students (M.Phil & Ph.D.) are also low at managing their own emotions. The mean score for the third factor 'managing others' emotions' was (M= 2.77) and the standard deviation was (SD= .580) which shows the low ratio of research students (M.Phil & Ph.D.) at managing others emotions. The mean score for the fourth and last factor 'utilization of emotions' was (M= 2.68) and the standard deviation was (SD= .704) which shows research students (M.Phil & Ph.D.) remain low at utilizing their emotions.Finally, the overall mean score of 'Emotional Intelligence' was (M= 2.44) and standard deviation was (SD= .338) which shows research students (M.Phil & Ph.D.) are not emotionally intelligent.

The second variable for this research study was Research Stress. The researcher measure five components of Research Stress; coursework stress, thesis writing stress, supervisor relationship stress, academic stress, socio-economic stress, and overall research stress of M.Phil and Ph.D. students. The mean score for the factor 'Coursework stress' was (M= 3.65) and standard deviation was (SD= .671) which shows research students (M.Phil & Ph.D.) are facing stress during their course work in MPhil and Ph.D. studies.The mean score for the factor 'Thesis writing stress' was (M= 3.72) and the standard deviation was (SD= .537

which shows research students (M.Phil & Ph.D.) are much under stress while writing their thesis. The stress and anxiety among doctoral students in the process of the dissertation are caused by the thesis as a major source of stress (Bazrafkan et al, 2016). The mean score for the factor 'Supervisor relationship stress' was (M= 3.13) and the standard deviation was (SD= .766) which shows research students (M.Phil & Ph.D.) are facing supervisor relationship stress. The relationships with supervisors and socio-economic issues stem from an inappropriate and unstructured environmentas well asan unclear and undefined educational atmosphere with personal tasks and responsibilities(Bazrafkan et al, 2016).The mean score for the factor 'Academic stress' was (M= 3.69) and the standard deviation was (SD= .684) which shows research students are facing academic stress while studying in their universities. The mean score for the factor 'Socio-economic stress' was (M= 3.57) and standard deviation was (SD= .579) which shows post-graduate students (M.Phil & Ph.D.) are facing socio-economic stress during MPhil and Ph.D. studies. According to the findings of Wang et al., (2019) various socio-economic and academic factors for stress experienced by 10 Chinese Ph.D. students.The overall mean score of 'Research Stress' was (M= 3.52) and standard deviation was (SD= .412) which shows that the research students (M.Phil & Ph.D.) are facing stress during their studies at universities.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the emotional Intelligence for MPhil and Ph.D. scholars. Significant differences were found (t= -6.000, p= <.001) and the mean score for MPhil (M= 2.3590, SD= .27214) and PhD (M= 2.7338, SD= .38830) which shows PhD

students Emotional Intelligence level is higher than MPhil students. Hence $H_o 1$ was rejected. T-test was also conducted to compare the Research Stress for MPhil & Ph.D. respondents. Significant differences were found(t= -9.990, p= <.001) and the mean score for MPhil (M= 3.6198, SD= .40781) and PhD (M= 3.1844, SD= .19146) which shows MPhil students are facing more stress than PhD students. Hence $H_o 2$ was rejected.Spearman rank correlation test was conducted to measure the relationship between the Emotional Intelligence and the Research Stress of MPhil and Ph.D. respondents. There was a negative correlation (rho= **-.604**[**]) between the Emotional Intelligence and Research Stress of research scholars. The test statistic was significant at (p=0.01) which means that the differences are highly significant. Hence $H_o 3$ was rejected.

Conclusion

From the practical analysis of this study, it is found that research students are low at their emotional intelligence level. They are not good at perceiving, managing, and utilizing their emotions. Research students are also facing a range of stress at all stages of their research program. It includes coursework, thesis, supervisor-relationship, academic, and socioeconomic stress. Thus, there was a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and research stress among MPhil and Ph.D. students. Lower levels of Emotional Intelligence relate to higher levels of stress suggests that we should be helping students develop their Emotional Intelligence. Helping research students develop their Emotional Intelligence holds promise to help them more effectively manage stress which should result in higher research performance and perhaps even post-

graduation rates.Therefore, every university should offer some stress management courses for students. These courses can help students to learn cognitive, social, and emotional skills,but these skills are not developed through lectures and discussion, we must focus ontheoretical knowledge. Students should understand some basic knowledge and skills that will help them to become outstanding or achievable research performers and adapt to effective leadership skills.

Recommendations

- ❖ Problem-centered andemotion-centered strategies should be preferred strategiesfor relievingstress, using students counseling services, and curriculum and policy changes designedto help students cope with identified stressors.
- ❖ Postgraduate students need to better understand the thesis as a journey and understand the stress factors.
- ❖ Efficient communication with the supervisor is required to reduce the stress and other effective personnelto guide the student to complete the thesis task.
- ❖ Masters, doctoral students, and administrators need to improve to increase their awareness of these stressors and use stress management strategies creatively.
- ❖ Faculty staff and students need to find ways to reduce stressors and improveEI. Faculty staff and supervisors should assess the sources of stress and help mastersand doctoral students cope with stressthrough critical thinking and problem-solving methods.

❖ Seminars should be organized in universities to enable students to better understand their own emotions or how emotionsaffect their education and academic/research performance.

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