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Emotional Intelligence and Academic Self-Efficacy in Employed and Unemployed Students

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Abstract

Employment is one of the core behaviors regulating the modern societal structure. Research has shown that with the passage of years, an increasing number of students are getting employed and that there are numerous benefits and consequences of this phenomenon. Keeping this development in mind, it is imperative to study how jobs are affecting the students of our society. A sample of 250 undergraduate students was used, including 125 employed students and 125 unemployed students, ranging from the ages of 18 to 30 (*M*=21.26, *SD*=1.49). Data was collected using purposive sampling. The research was conducted using the Assessing Emotions Scale by Schutte et al. (1998) and Academic Self-efficacy scale (Ghafoor & Ashraf, 2007). An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the mean differences in emotional intelligence of employed and unemployed students. Significant differences were observed between employed (*M*=113.13, *SD*=24.37) and unemployed students (*M*=118.05, *SD*=19.47; *p*=.02). Students who were unemployed were found to have higher emotional intelligence than employed students. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the academic self-efficacy scores for employed and unemployed students. There was no significant difference observed in scores for employed students (*M*=113.45, *SD* = 13.43) and unemployed students (*M*=116.40, *SD*=11.66; *p*=.15). This study has both practical and theoretical implications for future researchers who wish to examine the role of employment in mediating other psychological constructs among university students.

Keywords: Academic Self-efficacy, Emotional Intelligence, Student Employment, Work

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Introduction

In modern society, employment has been deemed as one of the most important phenomena for an adult's survival. The act of receiving compensation for the provision of services to a business or corporation is called employment (McIntosh, 2013). In developed countries, a large percentage of students in the universities attempt to create sources of income for themselves by finding employment in different jobs. A study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that 43% of undergraduate students and 78% of part-time undergraduates were employed (Snyder & Dillow, 2010).

Students' accomplishment of maintaining a balance between study and work is attained through the use of multiple cognitive abilities including emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence is the set of interrelated abilities at the conjunction of emotion and cognition; including the perception, processing, usage and regulation of emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The management and understanding of emotions are significant for the acquisition of success in various interpersonal and career-related domains

(Malik & Shahid, 2016). Academic self-efficacy is defined as the learner's introspective evaluation to successfully achieve educational ambitions (Elias & Macdonald, 2007). A comparison of emotional intelligence and academic self-efficacy among employed and unemployed students can provide useful insights into how employment status affects these variables. It is conceivable that the employed students' emotional intelligence and academic self-efficacy may be different from those who are unemployed, due to the pressures and responsibilities associated with employment. Previous literature has shown that employment has risen among student population and has had both positive and negative impacts on students' academic performance and mental health. As the trend for student employment is on the rise in Pakistan, there is a need to discuss how it is impacting students here. The primary agenda of this study is to close this research gap.

Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between academic self-efficacy and employment among university students?
2. Is there a relationship between emotional intelligence and employment among university students?

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant difference between the scores of employed and unemployed students on Academic Self-efficacy Scale.

H2: There is a significant difference between the scores of employed and unemployed students on Assessing Emotions Scale

Rationale

Previous literature has shown that employment has risen among student population and has had both positive and negative impacts on students' academic performance and mental health. As the trend for student employment is on the rise in Pakistan, there is a need to discuss how it is impacting students here. The main purpose of conducting this research is to fill this research gap.

Literature Review

Among college students, employment is a rapidly growing phenomenon. Neill (2015) reported that nearly 43% of full-time university students in Canada are working in any distinct month during the semester, and they work an average of 16 hours per week. According to the Eurostudent V survey, nearly 80% of young adults in The Netherlands work during their education, whereas the figure lies around 57% in Germany and Switzerland (Hauschildt et al., 2015). There are multiple factors that cause a student to consider employment during their higher education including financial struggles and need for the improvement of skills (Curtis & Shani, 2002). Considering the rise in student employment, researchers have investigated the increased workload and its impact on the students' academic performance. The impact of being employed whilst studying has mostly been evaluated by conducting correlation studies between the number of working hours and the academic accomplishment of the student. However, the findings have shown to be inconclusive and antithetical (Humphrey, 2006; Kulm & Cramer, 2006).

Existing research on academic self-efficacy and academic self-concepts is indicative of an ongoing discussion about different dimensions of the constructs. The discussion includes evaluations of self-perceived ability, both scientifically and theoretically illustrative of two discrete variables when they are studied within the same discipline (e.g., Skaalvik & Rankin, 1996). It also includes how both constructs interact with one another (Bandalos et al., 1995), their precursors (Bong &Skaalvik, 2003), as well as their ability to predict background factors like gender, prior knowledge, and outcomes like math interest, math anxiety, and math achievement (Pajares& Miller, 1994). There

is evidence of positively association between emotional intelligence and academic performance (MacCann et al, 2020). According to a meta-analysis, there is an estimated corrected correlation of .10 between Emotional Intelligence and academic achievement (k=10), however, different facets of emotional intelligence were not discerned in this analysis (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). Another meta-analysis also explored the interrelation between emotional intelligence and academic performance. The findings of this meta-analysis indicated a small positive correlation 17 between EI and academic performance (p=.17). However, the study only explored 14 articles and did not distinguish between ability and rating scales (Richardson et al., 2012).

There are multiple facets of emotional intelligence that can be linked to academic performance. Students with high emotional intelligence could be more capable of managing negative sentiments evoked by academic settings. A primary example of this could be test anxiety; however, there are a plethora of other emotions that are specific to academic settings (Pekrun et al., 2009). Students high on emotional intelligence would also manage the negative emotions evoked due to disappointment of bad grades or negative feedback on their work. They would also be better equipped to counter the boredom they face while studying concepts that lack practical value for them (Pekrun et al, 2010). Amongst other things, interpersonal intelligence is also a requirement for thriving in situations involving both study and work. It involves the capability to observe others 'moods and temperaments and to use these observations as a utility for speculating their future behavior. Robotham (2012)'s study had noteworthy findings as they found that students who were employed alongside their education reported a higher number of positive effects due to that employment. Some of the positive outcomes include improved ability to work with others, better time management, improved communication skills, higher self-confidence and improved ability to work in groups. All of these characteristics can be translated into higher levels of emotional intelligence and academic self-efficacy, thus supporting the idea of employment having a positive impact on emotional intelligence and academic self-efficacy.

In 1990, Salovey and Mayer concluded that the abilities related to emotional intelligence are categorized into five domains; self-awareness, emotion management, self-motivation, empathy and handling relationships. In light of these findings, it is plausible to assume that emotional intelligence will act as an aid for those students who face lower levels of happiness and satisfaction along with high depression when they attempt to construct apt behaviors and attitudes in reference to their academic work. Therefore, we can expect higher levels of emotional intelligence to regulate the relationship of psychological well-being with students' behaviors and attitudes. Elias and Loomis (2000) have also concluded that academic self-efficacy is a major prognosticator of academic performance. According to Bandura (1997), a student's perception of their own academic efficacy is more important than just their abilities as a predictor of academic success. Adding to this, academic self-efficacy has shown to be related to non-academic variables such as pro-social behaviors and depression (Bandura et al., 1996).The existing literature shows substantial evidence in the linkage between academic self-efficacy and academic performance (Elias & Loomis, 2000; Richardson et al.,2012). Nevertheless, the literature examining the relationships and routes which form this association are more complex. The connection between successful

employment and particular traits which may ultimately improve job performance has been the subject of both theoretical and empirical research. According to a study by Rode et al. (2007), emotional intelligence might account for the variation in managerial abilities like public speaking. People who could successfully identify and communicate their emotions were more emotionally sensitive and performed more proficiently in situations that required problem-solving (Mayer & Geher, 1996). Keeping in mind that workers who possess high emotional intelligence are more capable of understanding what constitutes appropriate emotional expression and of expressing certain emotions more quickly (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Weinzimmer et al. (2017) proposed that these people have higher positive spillover, which means that work functioning would speed up when family moods and emotions were elevated, and vice versa.

Elevated levels of emotional intelligence are associated with better social connections in the professional and family domains too. Mayer and colleagues (2008) identified this correlation in an analysis of 18 years of research that looks at emotional intelligence as a progenitor. Adding to the discernment that social intelligence theory provides to the correlation between emotional intelligence and work-family balance, the spillover theory (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) can provide additional justification on a more specific level for why individuals who are more emotionally intelligent experience greater work-family balance.

Method

Research Design

This study is quantitative in nature and uses a cross-sectional research design. A sample of 250, (125 employed students + 125 unemployed students) was used in this study. The sample size was calculated using a combination of g-power analysis and existing literature of the field. Purposive sampling was used to collect the data with a response rate of 98%. The data was collected in person, with the use of physical questionnaires.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=250)

Demographic Characteristics	***N***	***(%)***
Gender		
Male	99	39.6%
Female	151	60.4%
Employment Status		
Employed	125	50%
Unemployed	125	50%
Age		
18-20	77	30.8%
21-23	160	64%
24-30	13	5.2%

Note. *n*= frequency, %= percentage

Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria

Only students of humanities, social and pure sciences have been included in the study.

Measures

Academic Self-efficacy Questionnaire (Ghafoor & Ashraf, 2007)

The participants' academic self-efficacy was measured using the Academic Self-Efficacy

Questionnaire devised by Gafoor and Ashraf in 2007. The scale consists of 40 items of which 20 are positive and 20 are negative. It is a Likert type scale. The positive questions are scored 5 for exactly true, 4 for nearly true, 3 for neutral, 2 for nearly false and 1 for exactly false. The negative items were scored in the reverse order. The test-retest coefficient of correlation is .85 and the split-half reliability of the scale is .90. Higher scores indicate higher levels of academic self-efficacy.

Assessing Emotions Scale (Schutte et al., 1998)

To measure emotional intelligence the Assessing Emotions Scale by Schutte et al. (1998) was used in this study. The items of the scale are based upon the following factors: Perception of Emotion (items 5, 9, 15, 18, 19, 22, 25, 29, 32, 33), Managing one's Own Emotions (items 2, 3, 10, 12, 14, 21, 23, 28, 31), Managing Others' Emotions (items 1, 4, 11, 13, 16, 24, 26, 30), and Utilization of Emotion (items 6, 7, 8, 17, 20, 27). The scale was found to have an internal consistency of 0.90, measured through Cronbach's Alpha in the development sample of 346 participants and the mean alpha across samples is .87. Schutte et al. (1998) also reported a two-week test-retest reliability of .78 for the total scale scores. Higher scores on the Assessing Emotions Scale are indicative of higher emotional intelligence.

Procedure

The participants were asked to sign a consent form, and upon consenting they were requested to fill out a questionnaire. Throughout the research, the participants remained anonymous; as stated and were aware of their right to withdraw, as mentioned in the consent form. They were also briefed about the objectives of the research initially. The questionnaires were filled out via paper pencil method. The study was first approved by the Board of Studies (BOS) and Ethics Review Committee (ERC) followed by a final review from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The data was collected from different private and public universities of Lahore after seeking permissions from the relevant authorities. The ethical considerations of research as devised by APA, were taken into account throughout the research.

Statistical Analysis

The descriptive analyses (means, standard deviations and percentages) and independent samples t-test were used in this study using IBM SPSS 26.

Ethical Considerations

1. Each participant was asked fill out a consent form.
2. Each participant was given the choice to withdraw from the study at any given point in time.
3. No deception was used in the research.
4. To help them understand the objective of the research, each participant was given a briefing on the study.
5. The researcher and supervisor were the sole people with access to the data and the information was used for the study only.
6. No identifying information was recorded in data collection.

Results

As the study aimed to compare the mean scores of emotional intelligence and academic self-efficacy among employed and unemployed students, independent samples t-test was conducted. After completing data analysis, the results showed that there was a significant difference in the mean scores of employed and unemployed students' emotional intelligence and insignificant difference among the mean scores of academic self-efficacy of both the groups.

Table 2
Psychometric Properties of Scales (N=250)

Scales	No of Items	α
Academic Self-Efficacy Scale	40	0.66
Assessing Emotions Scale	33	0.92

The academic self-efficacy scale used for this study consisted of 40 items and was found to have Cronbach's alpha value of .66, whereas the assessing emotions scale used had 33 items and a Cronbach's alpha value of .92. These values are indicative of the internal consistency of the scales. The Assessing Emotions Scale was found to have very high internal consistency as it is very close to 1, while the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale's internal consistency was somewhat weaker. The data was found to be normally distributed as concluded by the reliability analysis.

Table 3
t test for Employment Differences in Academic Self-Efficacy and Emotional Intelligence (N=250)

Variables	Employed (*n*=125)		Unemployed (*n*=125)				
	M	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***t***	***p***	**Cohen's *d***
Academic Self-Efficacy	113.45	13.43	116.40	11.66	248	.15	.23
Emotional Intelligence	113.13	24.37	118.05	19.47	248	.02	.22

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the academic self-efficacy scores for employed and unemployed students. There was no significant difference observed in scores for employed students (*M*=113.45, *SD* = 13.43) and unemployed students (*M*=116.40, *SD*=11.66; *p*=.15). The Cohen's d value was found to be .23. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean differences in emotional intelligence of employed and unemployed students. Significant differences were observed between employed (*M*=113.13, *SD*=24.37) and unemployed students (*M*=118.05, *SD*=19.47; *p*=.023). Students who were unemployed were found to have higher emotional intelligence than employed students. The Cohen's d value for emotional intelligence was found to be .22.

Discussion

The research hypothesized a significant difference between emotional intelligence of employed and unemployed students. There was a significant difference found between levels of emotional intelligence of employed and unemployed students, with unemployed students having higher emotional intelligence. It is important to understand that employment is a very valuable experience and may result in many positive outcomes, but the findings of this study conclude otherwise. This study has conclusively shown that students who are employed have lower levels of emotional intelligence in contrast to those who are not. It has been shown in previous literature too that students with higher emotional intelligence perform better academically and socially. An example of this could be that those students who have

formed strong interpersonal relationships with their instructors are more likely to receive higher marks for subjective grading criteria (Adeyemi & Adeleye, 2008).There have been many findings related to the negative consequences of student employment including difficulty meeting university requirements (Humphrey, 2006), absenteeism (Julve, 2013), and an increased possibility of dropping out (Staff & Mortimer, 2007).When students are more focused on their career instead of their studies, they may struggle to build these interpersonal connections with their peers and instructors which could result in them feeling distant from them and could account for a lack in empathy as they are so heavily burdened themselves. The nature of employment may also play a big role in the students' emotional intelligence as some professions require higher emotional intelligence in contrast to others.

The research hypothesized that there would be a significant difference in the academic self-efficacy of employed and unemployed students. However, there was no significant difference found between levels of academic self-efficacy of employed and unemployed students, concluding that there is insignificant impact of employment on a student's academic self-efficacy.

Looking at these findings and previous literature, it is clear that the results for academic self-efficacy of students is non-conclusive as the academic self-efficacy of students may be adjudicated to a number of factors (Bandura, 1992). A student who has consistently performed well in university will have high self-efficacy (Wood & Bandura, 1989). However, when that student faces the workplace environment and finds his self struggling to complete tasks which his colleagues are comfortably doing, it may result in lower levels of self-esteem. These lowered levels of self-esteem may translate into lower levels of academic self-efficacy. Another factor which needs to be considered when looking at employed students' academic self-efficacy is the reason behind their employment. If a student is suffering from a financial crisis and needs to work in order to support his family and pay his tuition, there is a great possibility that that student may not have the best academic performance due to his mind being preoccupied with external stressors.

Implications

The research fulfills a research gap and can pave the way for future researchers as these variables have never previously been studied in this manner in Pakistan. One of my hypotheses was rejected; however, it is pertinent to note that there are many confounding variables that may account for the results being inconclusive. If factors like socioeconomic status are taken into account, future researchers can decipher whether or not the student is working out of necessity. Another approach that future researchers could take would be to flip the study and measure how the variables are affected after students begin their jobs.

Limitations & Recommendations

One of the primary limitations was the focus on young adults. People who return to continue their education in their 30s were not considered when conducting this study. A larger sample size with more diverse ages of participants could result in more conclusive findings. The operational definition of employment is also a limitation of this research. As employment has been defined as someone paid to work for an organization, this includes remote workers too who never get the chance to experience the workplace environment. Due to this, there is a lack of homogeneity across the sample. Another potential limitation is the fact that there were a higher number of females as compared to males in the research, which also results in a lack of homogeneity in the sample. The Cronbach's alpha value for Academic Self-

efficacy scale is 0.66 which may have affected our results. The students' reason for employment also needs to be considered, which could potentially impact their emotional intelligence and academic self-efficacy.

Conclusion

To conclude, the first hypothesis was rejected as there was no statistically significant difference found between employed and unemployed students' scores on the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale. The second hypothesis postulated that there would be a difference in the emotional intelligence of employed and unemployed students. This was proven to be correct as unemployed students were found to have higher emotional intelligence in contrast to employed students. There are a number of reasons that could account for these reasons as mentioned in the discussion and limitations section. We believe that this academic research fulfills a major research gap and could potentially pave the way for many future researchers.

Contribution of Authors

Saood Belal Syed: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft

Eisha Shahid: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [S.B.S.] upon the reasonable request.

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