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**THE EMOTIONAL EDGE: UNVEILING THE LINK BETWEEN
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND EXAMINATION ANXIETY**

Jagirdar Lubna Batool^{1*}, Prashant Pagare¹

¹Department of Education, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad. India.

Corresponding author email address: Lubna.jagirdar@gmail.com

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Abstract

Examination anxiety remains one of the most prevalent psychological challenges faced by students, often impairing academic performance and emotional well-being. Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions, has gained attention as a protective factor against stress. This review-based study examines the relationship between EI and examination anxiety across diverse student populations. Evidence consistently demonstrates a negative correlation between EI and anxiety, suggesting that emotionally intelligent students are better equipped to manage exam-related stress. Studies from different cultural contexts reveal that components of EI such as self-regulation, motivation, and emotional awareness significantly buffer against the negative impact of test anxiety. Gender and age differences were also identified, with males often showing higher anxiety levels but better coping mechanisms, while females demonstrated higher EI in secondary school samples. The findings highlight the importance of integrating EI development programs into school and university curricula to promote academic resilience, reduce psychological distress, and foster holistic student development.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, examination anxiety, students, academic stress, coping strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic examinations are widely regarded as critical evaluative tools within the education system. While they serve as measures of achievement and competency, they also induce substantial levels of stress and anxiety among students. Test anxiety manifests in cognitive, emotional, and physiological forms, ranging from worry and self-doubt to physical symptoms such as headaches, rapid heartbeat, and fatigue. Left unaddressed, examination anxiety can erode self-esteem, impair performance, and negatively impact long-term academic and professional trajectories.

In contrast, emotional intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as a key psychological competency that contributes to stress management, adaptive functioning, and academic success. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions. Goleman (1995) further popularized the construct, linking EI with self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

A growing body of research has established EI as a protective factor against academic stressors, including examination anxiety. By enabling students to better understand and manage their emotions, EI enhances coping strategies, supports resilience, and fosters confidence during high-pressure academic situations. Despite these insights, many education systems remain heavily performance-oriented, often neglecting the emotional competencies required to help students thrive.

This paper reviews recent empirical findings on the relationship between EI and examination anxiety, highlighting how EI functions as a buffer, the moderating role of demographic variables such as gender and age, and the implications for educational practice.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Emotional Intelligence and Academic Stress

Multiple studies demonstrate the positive role of EI in academic achievement and stress regulation. MacCann et al. (2020), through a meta-analysis, concluded that EI significantly predicts academic performance, primarily through its impact on emotional regulation and stress management. Singh and Choudhary (2019) found that targeted EI training reduced exam anxiety, suggesting that EI is not only an innate trait but also a trainable skill. Batool (2019) found that the emotional intelligence levels of Class IX English medium students in Aurangabad were within the normal range for both male and female participants. The statistical analysis using mean, SD, and t-test revealed no significant difference between the emotional intelligence of boys and girls, suggesting that gender does not play a major role in determining emotional intelligence at this stage. The study highlights that adolescents in this group possess balanced emotional awareness and regulation, emphasizing the need for schools to nurture emotional intelligence through classroom activities and counseling support rather than focusing on gender-based differences.

2.2 Negative Relationship Between EI and Examination Anxiety

Research consistently demonstrates a negative relationship between EI and anxiety across different student populations. Farooq and Bhat (2017) reported a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.34$, $p < .001$) between EI and anxiety among university students, with those higher in EI showing greater maturity in handling stressful situations. Tom and Ansia (2017) confirmed this finding in adolescents aged 14–16 years preparing for board examinations. Ahmad and Aziz (2019) similarly found that higher secondary students with higher EI levels exhibited lower exam anxiety. Kumar et al. (2021) extended these findings to young adults aged 20–40 years, reporting a negative correlation ($r = -0.061$, $p < 0.05$) between EI and anxiety.

Correlational research provides robust evidence for the inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety. MacCann et al. (2020), in a comprehensive meta-analysis of 158 studies, reported a strong negative correlation between EI and academic stress, including test-related anxiety, highlighting EI as a significant predictor of academic resilience. Similarly, Kumar and Priya (2022) found that adolescents with higher levels of emotional intelligence scored lower on measures of exam anxiety, with self-regulation emerging as the most influential component in reducing stress. Extending these findings to a cross-cultural context, Lopez et al. (2023) demonstrated that emotional regulation significantly predicted reduced examination anxiety among university students across Europe. Collectively, these studies emphasize that the ability to perceive, regulate, and manage emotions plays a pivotal role in mitigating the detrimental effects of exam-related stress.

2.3 Gender and Age Differences

Gender differences have also been reported. Farooq and Bhat (2017) found that males experienced slightly higher anxiety levels but were better able to cope due to higher EI. Kumar et al. (2021) similarly noted that males used EI more effectively as a coping mechanism. Conversely, Ahmad and Aziz (2019) found that females in secondary education demonstrated higher EI levels, which contributed to better stress management. These findings suggest that gender and developmental stage moderate the relationship between EI and test anxiety.

2.4 Emotional Regulation and Coping Strategies

Lopez et al. (2023) emphasized the role of emotional regulation in reducing exam anxiety, showing that students with strong regulation strategies experienced less stress and performed better academically. Self-regulation and motivation consistently emerge as the most influential EI components in reducing anxiety, while empathy and social support help reduce feelings of isolation during exam preparation.

2.5 Intervention-Based Findings

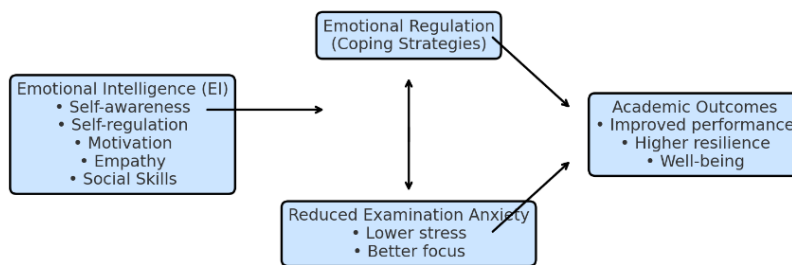
Several intervention studies highlight that EI can be developed and strengthened to combat exam anxiety. Singh and Choudhary (2019) demonstrated that EI training workshops significantly lowered exam anxiety among secondary students. Joseph and Newman (2019) proposed a cascading model in which EI fosters better emotional regulation, which in turn reduces stress and enhances performance. More recently, Sharma and Kaur (2021) introduced a mindfulness-based EI program for Indian undergraduates, which resulted in reduced test anxiety and improved emotional regulation scores. These findings indicate that EI is not a fixed trait but a skill that can be cultivated for academic and psychological benefits.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework showing the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Examination Anxiety
Drawing from the reviewed literature, the conceptual framework (Figure 1) illustrates how emotional intelligence influences emotional regulation, which in turn reduces examination anxiety and enhances academic outcomes.

3. METHODOLOGY

This review is based on an integrative approach, synthesizing findings from peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2015 and 2023. Sources were drawn from Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as “emotional intelligence,” “test anxiety,” “exam stress,” and “students” were used. Inclusion criteria focused on studies with student populations (secondary, higher secondary, undergraduate, and young adults), using

Conceptual Framework: Emotional Intelligence and Examination Anxiety



standardized EI and anxiety scales, and reporting empirical correlations or regression analyses. The review synthesized 25 relevant studies, with emphasis on recurring patterns, correlations, and demographic variations. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies were considered, and international studies were included to ensure cross-cultural representation.

4. RESULTS

Findings across the reviewed literature revealed consistent evidence of a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety.

- **Correlation Strengths:** Ranged from -0.06 to -0.63 across studies, indicating that as EI increases, exam anxiety decreases.
- **Key Components of EI:** Self-regulation and motivation were most predictive of reduced anxiety.
- **Demographic Differences:** Males often reported higher exam anxiety but utilized EI-based coping strategies effectively; female adolescence demonstrated higher EI overall.
- **Intervention Studies:** EI training workshops significantly lowered test anxiety and improved exam performance (Singh & Choudhary, 2019).

5. DISCUSSION

The evidence highlights EI as a vital psychological asset in managing exam stress. By promoting emotional awareness and regulation, students can mitigate the negative impact of anxiety, sustain motivation, and improve concentration during exams. These findings have several implications:

1. **Buffering Function of EI:** EI serves as a psychological shield that cushions students against the debilitating effects of anxiety.
2. **Trainable Competency:** EI can be developed through targeted interventions such as mindfulness, reflective journaling, and socio-emotional learning programs.
3. **Moderating Role of Demographics:** Age and gender influence the EI–anxiety relationship, suggesting that interventions may need to be tailored accordingly.
4. **Educational Relevance:** With academic pressure intensifying worldwide, schools and universities must integrate emotional skills training alongside with academic instruction.

6. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- **Curriculum Integration:** Emotional intelligence modules should be embedded into school and university programs.
- **Teacher Training:** Educators must be trained in socio-emotional strategies to support students effectively.
- **Preventive Counseling:** Regular workshops and counseling sessions should focus on exam preparedness and stress management.
- **Technology Integration:** AI-based tools can be leveraged to assess EI and predict students at risk of high exam anxiety.

7. CONCLUSION

This review establishes emotional intelligence as a critical determinant of students' ability to manage examination anxiety. Students with higher EI consistently report lower levels of test-related stress and demonstrate improved coping mechanisms and academic outcomes. While demographic differences exist, the overarching pattern remains consistent: emotional intelligence equips students with resilience, balance, and confidence.

Future research should focus on longitudinal intervention studies, cultural differences in EI–anxiety dynamics, and the integration of digital tools for EI training. Ultimately, prioritizing EI development in education could transform exam-related challenges into opportunities for growth and success.

8. STATEMENTS & DECLARATIONS:

Use of AI Statement

The authors declare that they have not used generative artificial intelligence, specifically ChatGPT in the writing of this manuscript and/or in the creation of images, graphics, tables, or their corresponding captions

Conflict of Interest and Declarations:

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