UNVEILING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: A GENDER-BASED STUDY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Ms.Sara Asad[1*], Dr. Saima Dawood[2]

[1*]PhD Scholar, Centre for Clinical Psychology,University of the Punjab, Quaid-e-Azam Campus, Lahore, Pakistan, Email:sara.asad@kinnaird.edu.pk
[2]Professor & Director, Centre for Clinical Psychology, University of the Punjab, Quaid-e-Azam Campus, Lahore, Pakistan, Email:saimadawoodkhan.ccpsy@pu.edu.pk

*Corresponding Author: Ms.Sara Asad
*PhD Scholar, Centre for Clinical Psychology,University of the Punjab, Quaid-e-Azam Campus, Lahore, Pakistan, Email:sara.asad@kinnaird.edu.pk

Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate gender differences in emotional intelligence in university students of Lahore, Pakistan as well as to identify the predictive role of emotional intelligence related to gender. A cross-sectional research design was carried out and 300 university students (*Men* = 150; *Women* = 150) of 18-25 years (M_{age} = 21.36; SD = 1.47) were taken from University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan through purposive sampling strategy. Participants completed a demographic information sheet and a Scale for Emotional Intelligence-Short Form (Dawood, 2021). Data were analyzed through independent sample *t*-test and multiple binary logistic regression analysis. Findings indicated that men university students were significantly more emotionally intelligent in terms of motivation and social skills as compared to women university students. Moreover, self-awareness, motivation, and empathy significantly predicted the outcome of gender in university students. Implications for further research related to gender differences in emotional intelligence are discussed.

Keywords: Gender, University Students, Emotional Intelligence

1.Introduction

For the longest time, gender has been treated as stable and simple trait in the scientific literature; however, today researchers consider the psychology of gender as an exciting research area (Schudson, 2021). The research work on emotional intelligence has shown rapid growth, and it is assumed that individuals emotional functioning is largely influenced by gender. People express emotions differently due to gender, as men and women are nurtured and socialized to have different goals and motives depending on their cultural background, age, and the mindset of their social agents (Sahu & Das, 2016).

The term Emotional Intelligence (EI), originally proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990), is defined as people's way of perceiving, expressing, understanding and regulating emotions. EI has been operationalized through measurement methods based on various theoretical models of EI. It can be argued that basic difference in EI measurement methods have led researchers to explore different

dimensions (Mayer et al., 2008; Petrides et al., 2007). Ability and trait EI are two general streams of EI construct. Ability EI includes emotion-related abilities and it is assessed through maximum-performance tasks. In contrast, self-report questionnaires assess trait EI, which refers to the emotion-related personality dimension (Pérez et al., 2005). Following this classification method, ability EI tests gauge constructs associated with an individual's theoretical comprehension of emotions and emotional functioning. In contrast, trait EI questionnaires assess typical behaviors in situations relevant to emotions (such as encountering stress or comforting an upset friend) and self-assessed abilities (O'Connor et al., 2019). These two approaches to EI are found to have very low relationship with each other (Gohm et al., 2005) indicating that ability and trait EI are two separate constructs. The current study employed a self-report questionnaire to investigate the EI construct, with a specific focus on trait EI due to its strong predictive value for actual behaviors in different situations (Petrides & Furnham, 2000).

Goleman (2001) is a world known name who proposed the concept of EI trait-based model. EI describes the skill or capacity in recognizing, assessing and regulating one's own, others, and group emotions. People with high EI are more likely to become successful and productive at what they do and such people also help others to achieve the ladder of success. According to Goleman (2001), EI includes five components which are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. *Self-awareness* means the person has a deep understanding of one's strengths, shortcomings, emotions, drives, and needs. People having high self-awareness avoid being unrealistically optimistic and overly critical. Moreover, such people know how their emotions can influence them and other people around them. *Self-regulation* means people have tendency not to indulge in impulsive behaviours. *Motivation* pertains to one's inner desire to achieve for the sake of achievement. People with high motivations not only want to meet but exceed their own and others expectations levels. Failures or setbacks do not shake the confidence of highly motivated people. They still remain optimistic and committed to their objectives and goals. *Empathy* signifies ones tendency to be considerate and aware of others emotions and feelings. People with high *social skills* use friendliness to achieve their goals, and such people are found to be an effective persuader (Goleman, 1995). In conclusion, it can be argued that people with high EI are good at identifying and regulating their own and other people's emotions (Petrides & Furnham, 2006). People with low EI find it difficult to solve daily life problems which may negatively influence their subjective health (Marks et al., 2016; Megías et al., 2018). In contrast, researchers (Petrides et al., 2016) have also noted that high scores on self-report measures of EI are usually but not always adaptive. Similarly, low scores on EI self-report measures are usually but not always maladaptive. Thus, nature of the dependent variable and context of the situation cannot be ignored while determining the desirability of a specific trait EI profile.

One important issue in EI researches is the presence of gender differences (Ahmed et al., 2019; Salavera et al., 2019). The emotional side has traditionally been associated to a greater extent with female gender as they experience negative and positive emotions with more intensity in comparison to males (Ahmed et al., 2019; Das & Sahu, 2015). These findings have helped reinforced the widely held stereotype that women are more emotional (Lopez-Zafra & Gartzia, 2014). However, empirical evidence to date is contradictory and researchers are still trying to find alternative explanations for the existence of gender differences in EI. Inconsistent findings have emerged when used different self-report measures of EI based upon different EI approaches (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Austin et al. (2010) found women to be more aware of their emotions, more empathetic and more socially adept than men. Conversely, men were found to have more self-confidence, adaptability, and optimistic attitude. Ahmad et al. (2009) found men to be more emotionally intelligent than women when EI was measured on Bar-On's trait-based model. Till date, no clear significant gender differences have been observed through self-report EI measures and these studies argued that similarities are more profound than differences (Ahmad & Zadeh, 2016; Bibi et al., 2020; Mokhlesi & Patil, 2018; Whitman et al., 2009).

Thus, it can be speculated that there is a lack of clear empirical evidence about the gendered nature of EI and the gender differences may depend on the type of theoretical approach and the instrument

used. Based on a need to continue research in this area and the realization that socio-cultural factors influence how emotions are created, interpreted and expressed, present study is an attempt to extend the culture-specific EI investigation with regard to gender differences. The present study was unique as it used locally developed self-report Scale for Emotional Intelligence (SEI) based on Goleman's model (Dawood, 2021) to assess EI of university students in Lahore. To our knowledge, limited published empirical studies in Pakistan have assessed regression variance that EI can explain in the outcome of gender variable.

Following hypotheses were formulated in the light of previous empirical evidences:

- There will be significant gender differences in terms of emotional intelligence in university students of Lahore, Pakistan.
- Emotional intelligence will predict the outcome of gender in university students of Lahore, Pakistan.

2. Materials and Methods
2.1 Research Design
The present study employed cross sectional research design.

2.2 Sample and Sampling Strategy
The study included 300 university students (*men* = 150; *women* = 150) from Lahore, Pakistan between the age of 18 and 25 years (M_{age} =21.36; *SD* = 1.47). Purposive sampling strategy was used to select university students from different departments of University of the Punjab, a public sector university. The university students having physical disability, diagnosed with any psychological disorder, and had Psychology as a major subject were excluded.

2.3 Instruments
2.3.1 Demographic information questionnaire.
It was developed by researchers and included questions about age, gender, religion, department name, degree program and family system.

2.3.2 Scale for Emotional Intelligence-Short Form (SEI; Dawood, 2021).
It is an indigenously developed scale to assess EI based on Goleman's trait-based model. The need to use this specific scale stemmed from the notion that cultural frameworks govern the expression of emotion (Ahmed et al., 2019); hence, SEI may have superior explanatory power in highlighting gender differences over the present EI instruments which were developed in Western countries. SEI is a brief 108 item version of the 319 item Scale for Emotional Intelligence (Dawood et al., 2007). Participants on this scale responded items on a 5-point likert scale where 1 meant "*High Level of Disagreement*" and 4 meant "*High Level of Agreement*". It has 5 subscales: Self-Awareness (17 items), Self-Regulation (9 items), Motivation (28 items), Empathy (23 items), and Social Skills (31 items). Higher scores indicate high level of emotional intelligence. Internal consistency estimates ranged from .58 - .92 for subscales as reported by author (Dawood, 2021). In present study, all subscales: Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Empathy, and Social Skills were found to have Cronbach alpha reliabilities of .60, .70, .79, .87, & .93 respectively.

Table I *Study Participants' Socio-Demographic Characteristics (N = 300)*

Variables	Men		Women		Total	
	M(SD)	*f(%)*	*M(SD)*	*f(%)*	*M(SD)*	*f(%)*
Age	21.42 (1.69)		21.30 (1.21)		21.36 (1.47)	
Department						
Chemical Eng.		94 (62.7%)		7 (4.7%)		101 (33.7%)
Commerce		39 (26%)		37 (24.7%)		76 (25.3%)
Biochemistry		4 (2.7%)		47 (31.3%)		51 (17%)
Geography		4 (2.7%)		17(11.3%)		21 (7%)
Economics		----		7 (4.7%)		7 (2.3%)
Env. Sci		9 (6%)		35(23.3%)		44 (14.7%)
Degree Program						
Bachelors		98 (65.3%)		54 (36%)		152 (50.7%)
Masters		52 (34.7%)		96 (64%)		148 (49.3%)
Religion						
Islam		149 (99.3%)		145 (96.7%)		294 (98%)
Christianity		1 (7%)		5 (3.3%)		6 (2%)
Degree of RI						
Extreme		21 (14%)		9 (6%)		30 (10%)
Moderate		116 (77.3%)		135 (90%)		251 (83.7%)
Mild		13 (8.7%)		6 (4%)		19 (6.3%)
Not at all		----		----		----
Family System						
Nuclear		67 (44.7%)		121 (80.7%)		188 (62.7%)
Joint		83 (55.3%)		29 (19.3%)		112 (37.3%)

Note: Men = 150; Women = 150. Eng = Engineering; Env Sci = Environmental Science; RI = Religious Inclination

2.4 Procedure

This research was first approved by institutional review board of University of the Punjab, Lahore. Later, the researcher visited University of the Punjab, Lahore and sought permission from concerned head of the departments for data collection from students. Only those students were selected who fulfilled inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study. Data were collected from the departments of Chemical Engineering ($n = 101$), Commerce ($n = 76$), Biochemistry ($n = 51$), Environmental Sciences ($n = 44$), Geography ($n = 21$), and Economics ($n = 7$). Of all the 310 potential participants approached, only 10 research participants did not show willingness to participate in the study due to time constraints. This study had response rate of 96.7%. Written informed consent was taken from research participants who were willing to participate. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and were given right to withdraw from research at any point. They were also assured about confidentiality related to their identity and their responses. They were not given any incentive for participating in the study. After taking their consent, research participants completed SEI along with a demographic information sheet.

2.5 Statistical Analyses

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS; Version 22) was used to analyse the data. Independent sample *t*-test and multiple binary logistic regression analysis were used to derive the results from the data.

3. Results

Data were analyzed by using SPSS (Version 22). The sampling distribution of data was said to be approximately normally distributed as all study's variables had values of skewness and kurtosis falling within the acceptable range of ± 1.96.

Table II *Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence in University Students (N = 300)*

	Men		Women				
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Self-Awareness	3.68	.38	3.72	.42	-.93 (298)	.353	----
Self-Regulation	3.87	.54	3.77	.57	1.57 (298)	.118	----
Motivation	3.91	.33	3.83	.36	2.20 (298)	.028	.23
Empathy	3.98	.49	3.88	.47	1.76 (298)	.079	----
Social Skills	3.96	.56	3.74	.54	3.51 (198)	.001	.40

Note: men = 150; women = 150; df = degree of freedom
*$p < .05$. **$p <. 01$*

Independent sample *t*-tests were run to explore gender differences in five subscales of emotional intelligence in university students of Lahore, Pakistan. Homogeneity of variance assumption was met in all tests. Results suggested that men and women university students differed significantly in their Motivation and Social Skills. Mean score of men was significantly higher on subscales of Motivation and Social Skills as compared to women suggesting that men university students had more emotional intelligence in terms of Motivation and Social Skills than women university students. No significant gender differences were found in university students in Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Empathy.

Table III *Multiple Binary Logistic Regression Analysis (Forced Entry Method) showing Emotional Intelligence as the Outcome of Gender in University Students (N = 300)*

	β	S.E	Wald	O.R	95% CI	
Predictors					LL	UL
Self-Awareness	1.06	.37	8.05**	2.87	1.39	5.96
Self-Regulation	.18	.29	.41	1.20	.68	2.12
Motivation	-1.05	.50	4.51*	.35	.13	.92
Empathy	.51	.42	1.49	1.66	.74	3.76
Social Skills	-1.17	.35	11.31**	.31	.16	.62
Model χ^2 (df)	23.76***(5)					
Nagelkerke R^2	.10					

Note: Men = 150; Women = 150. Coding for gender (men = 1; women = 2); S.E = standard error; O.R = odd ratio; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. *** $p < .001$*

Multiple binary logistic regression analysis was run to ascertain emotional intelligence as predictor of gender in university students. The assumptions of independent errors, linearity, and no perfect multicollinearity were satisfied. No influential residuals and cases were also identified. The binary logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(5) = 23.76$, $p < .001$. The model explained 10% variance in the outcome and correctly classified 61.7% of the cases. Self-Awareness, Motivation, and Empathy emerged as significant predictors of gender in university students. Women were 2.87 times more likely to show Self-Awareness as compared to men. On the contrary, men significantly showed more Motivation and Social Skills as compared to women university students.

4. Discussion
The present study focused upon identifying gender differences in terms of EI in university students of Lahore, Pakistan. Findings of the study revealed that men university students had more motivation and better social skills as compared to women university students. Furthermore, EI explained significant 10% variance in the outcome of gender while Self-Awareness, Motivation, and Social Skills emerged as significant predictors of gender. Findings of the present study could both be supported and contradicted by the results of prior studies. Consistent with the results of many prior studies, our findings also concluded that men and women significantly differ from each other

in some emotional capacities. However, present study's results contradicted with the outcomes of many previous studies (Ciarrochi et al., 2005; Hall & Mast, 2008) as these studies concluded that women show positive and negative emotions more frequently and intensely, their emotional knowledge is superior, they are more competent in interpersonal interactions, and their socialization skills are better as compared to their men counterparts. Therefore, from a very early age, members of the general population and the scientific community hold this common notion that women have better EI skills and are more emotional than men (Feldman-Barrett et al., 2000). The present study also found women to have better Self-Awareness than men, but indicated at the same time that men have more Motivation and show better Social Skills as compared to women. Some evidence although rare (Ahmad et al., 2009; Shahzad & Bagum, 2012) also exists in literature that stated that men tend to have better EI. It is possible that results in literature related to gender differences in EI lack uniformity due to the kind of questionnaires used in the studies or the sample's socio-demographic characteristics. Different results can also be attributed to the different EI skills and theoretical model comprising the EI construct. Current study assessed trait EI in the sample by administering self-report measure of EI and researchers (Brackett et al., 2006) speculate that women self-report a lower EI than they actually appear to have in performance tests. It can be deduced from above mentioned discussion that women underestimate themselves while men overestimate themselves regarding their emotional skills on self-report measures of EI. Present findings could also be discussed in the context of Pakistani culture. Habib et al. (2013) developed a social intelligence scale for university students of Pakistan and found male university students to have better Social Skills as compared to female university students. They argued that this may be because of the gender-specific roles that men and women have to adopt in traditional collectivistic societies like Pakistan. Men in such societies are supposed to be responsible for their family values and take on leadership roles due to which they might have to exhibit efficient social skills and deal with different situations more effectively. On contrary, women's major responsibilities include looking after their home and family due to which they often find limited opportunities to socialize with people outside their immediate environment. In addition, in a collectivist society social shyness in women is evaluated more positively (Aizawa & Whatley, 2006). Similarly, Elizur and Beck (1994) as well as Ali and Majeed (2018) maintained that deep rooted socialization and religious processes prevailing in one's culture and not the basic biological differences between men and women are the reason behind gender differences in Motivation.

This study was not without its limitations. This study was limited to the students of University of the Punjab, Lahore and consequently may limit the generalizability of the findings across other age groups. This study used cross-sectional research design which cannot identify causes of outcome variables. Findings of present study are needed to be confirmed using prospective designs.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this research may have some future implications. Future researchers might want to establish if the gender differences found on EI in this study remain stable across different age groups. It would be an interesting objective for future researchers to investigate how much variance EI could explain for gender when the effect of cognitive abilities and personality variables are controlled.

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