



Journal of Education & Humanities Research (JEHR)

Institute of Education & Research (IER), University of Balochistan, Quetta-Pakistan

Volume: 16, Issue-II, 2023; ISSN:2415-2366 (Print) 2710-2971 (Online)

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URL: <http://web.uob.edu.pk/uob/Journals/jehr/jehr.php>

“A Study of Pakistani Students’ Perceptions of Emotional Intelligence at the University Level”

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Received: December 4, 2023

Accepted: December 19, 2023

Published: December 31, 2023

KEY WORDS

Emotional intelligence, perceptions, Self-regulation, Self-awareness, Motivation, Empathy, Social Skills

ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence is getting popular in western society and is considered to be more important than general IQ to get later employment and success in life. However, our school system still focuses only on inculcating the skills related to high IQ or high scores. The study aimed to examine Pakistani university students' views towards emotional intelligence and find the differences in their perceptions of emotional intelligence based on their demographic variables. A survey was conducted to collect the related information. It was quantitative research. A 5-point Likert scale was developed to collect data from students belonging to different universities in Karachi. A sample of 214 students was selected on a random basis from different disciplines and programs. Data frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation, independent sample t-test, and one-way ANOVA were used to analyze data. The result showed no significant difference in emotional intelligence scores based on age, degree program, or harassment or bullying experience. However, a significant difference in empathy was found based on the gender of respondents. Further, the results showed students' awareness regarding emotional intelligence and its significance for future success and believed that emotionally intelligent individuals easily adjust to any new situation.

Introduction

The youth of a country is considered as its backbone. Countries can reach the apex of success if their youth is motivated and well awarded for their worth and capabilities. University education is a terminal stage that prepares young citizens to step into different professions and lead the nation toward progress. For many decades IQ has been alone given credit for determining life success among students. It was believed that people with high IQ perform well at school, secure more marks, earn more money and get good jobs, but after introduction of emotional intelligence by Goleman (1995), this concept has changed drastically.

Although the Pakistani education system still focuses on grades and makes students believe that high grades can get them to achieve good jobs, more career success, and better personal life, recent research has shown that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in a contented personal and professional life. Besides this, it also has a sound impact on student's academic and post-academic life (Kant, 2019).

This issue was also highlighted in a recent news article by Naz (2020). The author emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence and focused on our current Pakistani educational system, which focuses only on the traditional notion of IQ and relating high scores with success. Besides that, Moten (2018) shared some techniques to enhance different aspects of emotional intelligence like self-awareness, adjustment, and relationship management in his news article. A similar issue related to our society was featured by other news reporters like Muteeb (2015) and Bilal (2016). However, the importance of emotional intelligence is underrated by Pakistani think tanks and our educational system. Its significance is still more to be addressed to our teachers, parents, students and educational reforming bodies.

Emotional intelligence is an individual's ability to identify his own emotions, understand them, control them and manipulate them according to the situation's need. Along with that, emotional intelligence is the ability to understand others' emotions through verbal and nonverbal cues. It also indicates how much a person is good at their social skills like empathy, conflict resolution, communication skills, relationship management, active listening, respect, and utilizing them to have sound relations with others.

If we date back to the history of emotional intelligence, in the 1920s and 1930s, Thorndike did a series of experiments and proposed the notion of social intelligence, which was believed to be an aspect of intelligence quotient and defined as the ability of an individual to understand others behaviours, control them and act appropriately in interpersonal relations. (Chan & Mallet, 2011). In 1933, John Dewey emphasized that students should be taught analytical skills to inculcate social debate skills, accept others' perspectives, interpersonal communication skills and build students into influential citizens for a democratic society (Belcastro, 2015). Moreover, in the 1960s, intelligence was defined as an adaptive process in society by Piaget (Titrek, 2009).

According to Daniel Goleman (1995), John Mayer and Peter Salovey (1989) invented the field of emotional intelligence (Freeman, 2005). They defined emotional intelligence as an individual's ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, understand and differentiate between different emotions and utilize that information to make decisions. Their emotional intelligence model is assumed to be cognitive oriented and proves emotional intelligence to be part of both general intelligence and social intelligence (Fiori & Maillefer, 2017). Moreover, they

designed an emotional intelligence model and gave an empirical demonstration to show a relation between emotional intelligence and cognitive abilities. (Mayer, DiPaolo & Salovey, 1990). In the same year, Baron (1997) gave a social-emotional intelligence model that proved that emotional intelligence has social and emotional abilities closely related to cognitive activities. (Fida, Ghaffar, Zaman & Satti, 2018).

In 1995, Daniel Goleman defined emotional intelligence from a different perspective. He proposed that emotional intelligence can know one's own emotions, manage those emotions, recognize emotions, motivate oneself, and create healthy relationships with others (Serrat, 2017). In 1998, Goleman expanded this perspective by adding personality traits such as self-awareness, flexibility, optimism, self-regulation, innovation, self-management, motivation, commitment, and conscientiousness. (Mehta & Singh, 2013; Ugoani, Amu & Emenike, 2015). According to Tyagi and Gautam (2017), the Goleman methodology is known as mix model, which consists of five key areas: self-awareness (the ability of a person to know his own emotions), self-regulation (the ability to control and redirect emotions), motivation (power of being driven toward achieving a task by starting and completion it), social skills (manage relations with others), and empathy (feeling and considering others emotions).

Goleman model got acceptance by many researchers and a vast body of research is done to showcase the importance and different aspects of emotional intelligence. It is found that emotional intelligence helps in social settings by providing individuals with skills of adjustment, self-regulation, adaptability, communication skills and relationships (Fischer & Manstead, 2016; Lopes, Salvey & Straus, 2003).

According to Tariq, Majoka and Hussain (2011), Pakistani university students

perceived self-awareness, managing emotions, reading emotions, and handling and controlling emotions as important. Furthermore, Kant (2019) reported that emotions are a strong motivational system that helps us, and directs us to start and complete any task. Also, emotions help us to make decisions when faced with a challenging situation. Moreover, emotional intelligence is essential in many psychological factors like attention, motivation, interest, memory, learning, retention of information and academic achievement (Planalp & Fitness, 1999). Similarly, individuals with high emotional intelligence were sound at professional and organizational developmental skills (Shahzad, Riaz, Begum & Khanum, 2014). Many human population attributes like gender, age, qualification, ethnic group, work experience, previous experience of being harassed or bullied, etc., are studied statistically to find their relation with emotional intelligence. There are many controversial findings related to the connection of emotional intelligence with these attributes. Cakan and Altun (2005) found no notable difference in respondents' emotional intelligence based on their gender, age, and job experience. However, in other studies, female students' scores were found to be higher than males on emotional intelligence (Chaudhry, Ali, Sajjad & Ali, 2013; Kant, 2019; Bibi, Saqlain & Mussawar, 2016). In contrast, Varghese, Norman and Thavaraj (2016) found females have more stress and health issues due to lower emotional intelligence than male students. Ahmad, Bangash, and Khan (2009) also reported that males have more emotional intelligence than females. Other studies suggest no difference in female and male emotional intelligence perceptions (Nasir & Masrur, 2010). However, Meshkat and Nejati (2017) found females scored more on self-awareness, self-regard, empathy, and interpersonal relationships than male students.

It can be seen that there is a difference in the mean scores in adolescent and young adults and males and females. Two-way analysis of variance found an insignificant main effect of both variables but a significant interaction effect of age and gender. It can be concluded that age and gender both are very significant and affective variables that can affect emotional intelligence during the life span of a person.

Dhillon (2018) reported that emotional intelligence increases with increasing age. There were many factors behind that, like social exposure and experience. Young adults were found to have more emotional intelligence than adolescents. Similar results were found in a study conducted by Girdhalwal (2007) on respondents belonging to the health care industry (Adams, 2011)

Apart from that, Amirtha and Kadhiravan (2006) related emotional intelligence to an individual's qualification. According to the study qualification of an individual and their experience also positively influences emotional intelligence development, which further enhances their ability to understand, adjust and learn. (Kant & Lenka, 2013)

Research in cognitive sciences has revealed that emotions are related to certain areas of cognition or the mind. The experiences that involve emotions have more impact on attention, memory, perception, decision-making, retention of knowledge, choices in life, and how one reacts to any situation (Brosch, Scherer, Grandjean & Sander, 2013). Students who are bullied or harassed in educational settings by their peers or teachers may negatively impact themselves. They have a high level of anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, absenteeism, trust issues, decreased academic performance and self-destructive behavior (Hendricks & Tanga, 2019). Students with high emotional intelligence deal with stressful situations with more maturity than students with low emotional intelligence (Bhat & Khan,

2017). Besides that, people with high emotional intelligence had reasonable control over their emotions, which enabled them to cope with stressful situations. They showed a positive attitude at the workplace despite all the work stressors in the environment (Matthews, Zeidner & Roberts, 2017).

The above literature shows the importance of emotional intelligence on many attributes of the human population. The purpose of the present study was to determine Pakistani university students' perceptions of emotional intelligence and their perceptions based on demographic variables like age, gender, degree program and their experience of being bullied or harassed at university. This study was important as there are no courses included in our education system, which can inculcate emotional intelligence qualities. It can also serve as an usher to policymakers, teachers, parents, educational planners, government, and non-government organizations in critical arts to refine the quality of education and performance by including emotional intelligence content.

Research Objectives and Questions

The objectives of the study were to;

1. Identify the perceptions of students towards emotional intelligence at the university level in Pakistan.
2. Find out the differences in students' perceptions of emotional intelligence based on the demographic variables of gender, age, degree program, and experience of being bullied or harassed at university.

For this purpose, the following research questions were developed;

1. What are the perceptions of Pakistani university students towards emotional intelligence?
2. Is there any difference in university students' perceptions of emotional intelligence based on their gender, age, degree program and experience of being victims of bullying or harassment?

Some Pakistani research showed a positive relationship between emotional intelligence with academic performance, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, self-esteem and awareness, adaptability to new situations, stress management, emotional control, and increased motivation (Farooq, 2003; Bibi, Saqlain & Mussawar, 2016; Suleman, Hussain, Syed, & Parveen, 2019; Tariq, Majoka & Hussain, 2011). However, there are still many areas that need further research.

Research Methodology

The present study was a quantitative expedition to investigate the perceptions of Pakistani university students on emotional intelligence. The researcher surveyed to collect data as the study population was very large and had homogeneous characteristics. The sample of 214 students was selected on random bases belonging to different degree programs from Karachi universities. A questionnaire was used to collect data. It had two sections. Section one consisted of respondents' demographic variables like age, gender, degree program, and whether they were ever being bullied or harassed in social settings. Section two was comprised of a 5- point Likert scale, in which 25 items were given in the questionnaire. Items designed for this purpose were based on five factors of emotional intelligence given by Goleman (1995). Based on the expert's opinion, some factors were selected, including self-regulation, self-awareness, empathy, social skills, and intrinsic motivation. Five items were designed on each element and validated by the experts in emotional intelligence. A pilot study was carried out to ensure the questionnaire's consistency, and reliability was measured through the Cronbach alpha coefficient. Table 1 shows the details of the reliability test.

Table 1

Reliability of the Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.847	25

Table 1 shows the reliability of the scale. For obtaining data, a 5-point Likert scale consisting of 25 items was developed. The purpose was to find the perceptions of university students about different aspects of emotional intelligence. The Cronbach Alpha test was used to find the reliability of the questionnaire. A pilot study was also done with a sample of 25 students only. The reliability index found was 0.847, which shows good reliability, and the scale was statistically significant.

Data Analysis

After collecting all the questionnaires, data was keyed in for analysis through the use of SPSS (statistical package for social sciences) for statistical analysis. Different types of tests, both descriptive and inferential, were administered to find the results. The descriptive statistics consisted of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation. Also, inferential statistics like independent sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to find differences based on gender and other demographic variables. The following tables present a detailed description of data analysis.

Table 2

Distribution and percentage of respondents according to demographic information.

Variables	Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	71	33.2
	Female	143	66.8
	Total	214	100.0
Age	15- 25	111	51.9
	26-35	72	33.6
	36-45	28	13.1
	46-55	3	1.4
Program	B.A	20	9.3
	B.Sc.	76	35.5
	MA	38	17.8
	MSc	43	20.1
	M.Phil.	29	13.6
	PhD	8	3.7
Students bullied, harassed or had negative vibes	Yes	58	24.8
	Sometimes	72	33.6
	No	89	41.6

Table 2 presents the frequencies and percentage of the selected sample based on demographic characteristics (gender, qualification, age and whether students have ever experienced extreme emotions at university or school-like harassment or bullying). The analysis of data showed that 143 female and 71 male students participated in the study. Most of the respondents were aged between 15-25 years. Based on qualification, most of the students were from the MSc program. Fifty-eight students reported that they experienced negative emotions at university, 72 students reported that they had experienced it sometimes, and 89 responded that they have never experienced any negative vibes, harassment or bullying at university. So, most students never faced any negative emotions in university because of fellow students or teachers.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviations of Self-Regulation

Statements	Mean	SD
One should..... have control over one's emotions	2.03	1.089
Never react when they are angry	1.82	1.144
Try to find a solution to problems without feeling stressed	2.13	0.924
Analyse each action before reacting to any incident	1.64	0.661
When your fellows tease you, take it as a challenge	2.39	0.935

Table 3 shows the mean scores of items related to the perception of self-regulation measured by the researcher. The highest mean value among these items was ($M=2.39$, $SD= .935$). It means most students believe that when someone teases them, they should control their negative emotions like anger, frustration, disappointment, or stress and take that as a challenge that can motivate them and feel happy. Among the self-regulation items,

the lowest mean score obtained was ($M= 1.64$, $SD=0.661$), which was related to analyzing each action before reacting to any incident. Although most students believed that they should control their emotions and take negative emotions as challenges, analyzing every action before reacting was not considered that much important.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviations of Intrinsic Motivation

Statements	Mean	SD
One should.....keep the focus on one's goals	1.72	0.808
take criticism positively and work around it	1.76	0.778
feel good about success no matter how common that task was.	1.64	0.711
never give up and believe in oneself when facing a challenge	1.58	0.706
Emotions are more important than material things to make life worth living	1.80	0.770

Table 4 presents the mean scores of items related to intrinsic motivation. The highest mean obtained in the above table was ($M=1.80$, $SD=0.77$), which was scored on the importance of emotions over material things. It shows that students perceive emotions are more important than material things, and emotions can make life more worth living. The lowest mean observed was ($M= 1.58$, $SD=0.706$), which was related to never giving up and believing in themselves in difficult times. It shows that although students believe emotions are more important than material things in life, they think that believing in themselves and never giving up is difficult.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviations of Social Skills

Statements	Mean	SD
One should.....share his emotions with others	2.50	1.082
Complement others when they have done something well	1.49	0.633
Not allow his emotions to spoil his relations with others	1.71	0.724
Accept diversity of abilities in people	1.52	0.662
Built ability to adjust to different kinds of people	1.61	0.675

Table 5 shows details of mean scores of items related to social skills like sharing, complimenting others, acceptability to the diversity of abilities, adjustment and good relations. The highest mean score obtained on these items was ($M=2.50$, $SD= 1.082$) related to sharing of emotions with others. It means most of the students believe that sharing of emotions is essential. The lowest mean computed was ($M= 1.52$, $SD=0.662$), which was associated with acceptance of the diversity of people's abilities. From the results, it can be concluded that students do believe in the significance of sharing emotions with others, but acceptance of diversity of capacities in people is not that important.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviations of Self-awareness

Statements	Mean	SD
One should.....recognize his emotions while experiencing them	1.72	.592
Be aware of non-verbal messages one send to others	1.91	.859
Have the ability to distinguish between different emotions	1..62	.644

Know the reason when experiencing any emotion	1.83	.787
present oneself in a way that makes a good impression on others	1.87	.815

Table 6 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of items related to self-awareness. In the above table, the highest mean calculated was ($M=1.91$, $SD=0.77$), which shows that students believe in the importance of understanding and awareness of non-verbal messages sent by others. The lowest mean observed was ($M= 1.62$, $SD=0.644$), which was connected to having the ability to distinguish between different emotions. The results show that most students believe that it is vital to recognize nonverbal messages from others, but discrimination between emotions is not that important.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviations of Empathy

Statements	Mean	SD
One should.....		
Go out of the way to help someone in need	1.86	.804
Be sensitive and respectable to the feeling of others	1.62	.694
Feel the pain others are going through	1.62	.720
Try to understand others perspectives and forgive them	1.74	.721
recognize emotions people are experiencing by looking at their facial expressions	1.94	.902

Table 7 shows details of mean scores of items related to empathy, like helping others, respecting, feeling the pain of others, understanding others' issues and forgiving them. The highest mean score obtained on these items was ($M=1.94$, $SD= 0.902$), which shows that most students think it is important to recognize emotions people are experiencing by looking at their facial expressions even if they do not express them through words. The lowest mean computed was ($M= 1.62$, $SD=0.694$ and 0.720), which was associated with being sensitive and

respectable to others' feelings and feeling others' pain.

Table 8

An Independent Sample t-test for Difference in Students perception of Emotional Intelligence based on Gender

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	t-value	df	Sig.
Empathy	Male	71	1.7577	.53550	-.015	212	0.431
	Female	143	1.7566	.50582			
Self-awareness	Male	71	1.7859	.51749	.145	212	0.074
	Female	143	1.7958	.44308			
Social skills	Male	71	1.8059	.46840	.857	212	0.871
	Female	143	1.7497	.44372			
Intrinsic motivation	Male	71	1.7239	.53811	-.543	212	0.211
	Female	143	1.6867	.43674			
Self-regulation	Male	71	1.9775	.56422	.474	212	0.242
	Female	143	2.0154	.54493			

Statistics of Table 8 are mentioning the perception of emotional intelligence based on the gender of respondents. Overall, there was no significant difference in self-awareness, social skills, intrinsic motivation, and self-regulation. It means both genders have the same perceptions about these factors, but the t value of empathy (t =.015) shows a significant difference between both genders' perceptions. It shows that the perception of empathy in male and female respondents was different from one another.

Table 9

One Way ANOVA for the Difference in the Mean Score based on Age

		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Empathy	Between Groups	.298	3	.099	.371	.774
	Within Groups	56.107	210	.267		
	Total	56.404	213			
Self-Awareness	Between Groups	.636	3	.212	.968	.409
	Within Groups	45.992	210	.219		
	Total	46.628	213			
Social skills	Between Groups	.010	3	.003	.017	.997
	Within Groups	43.453	210	.207		
	Total	43.464	213			
Intrinsic motivation	Between Groups	.631	3	.210	.944	.420
	Within Groups	46.789	210	.223		
	Total	47.420	213			
Self-regulation	Between Groups	1.617	3	.539	1.800	.148
	Within Groups	62.901	210	.300		
	Total	64.518	213			

Table 9 shows that one-way ANOVA was used to explore the difference among the mean scores of empathy, self-awareness, social skills, intrinsic motivation and self-regulation based on the respondent's age. These perceptions were collected in five areas i.e. empathy $F(3,210) = .371, p = .774$; self-awareness $F(3, 210) = .968, p = .409$; social skills $F(3, 210) = .017, p = .997$; intrinsic motivation $F(3,210) = .944, p = 1.800, p = .148$. The results show no significant difference in scores of all five factors based on participants' age, which specifies that students of different ages had the same perceptions about all five emotional intelligence factors.

Table 10

One Way ANOVA for the Difference in the Mean Score based on the program

		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Empathy	Between Groups	1.651	5	.330	1.255	.285
	Within Groups	54.733	208	.263		
	Total	56.404	213			
Self-awareness	Between Groups	.708	5	.142	.641	.669
	Within Groups	45.920	208	.221		
	Total	46.628	213			
Social skills	Between Groups	.773	5	.155	.753	.585
	Within Groups	42.691	208	.205		
	Total	43.464	213			
Intrinsic motivation	Between Groups	.933	5	.187	.835	.526
	Within Groups	46.486	208	.223		
	Total	47.420	213			
Self-regulation	Between Groups	1.738	5	.348	1.151	.334
	Within Groups	62.781	208	.302		
	Total	64.518	213			

Table 10 reveals that a one-way analysis of variance was used to explore the difference among the mean scores of empathy, self-awareness, social skills, intrinsic motivation and self-regulation based on a program in which students are enrolled. These perceptions were collected in five factors, i.e., Empathy $F(5, 208) = 1.255, p = .285$; self-awareness $F(5,208) = .641, p = .669$; social skills $F(5,208) = .753, p = .585$; intrinsic motivation $F(5, 208) = .835, p = .526$ and self-regulation $F(5,208) = .1151, p = .334$. The results show no significant difference in scores of

all the factors based on the program in which students are enrolled, which specifies that teachers of the different programs had the same perceptions about emotional intelligence factors.

Table 11

One Way ANOVA for the Difference in the Mean Score based On the experience of students of bullying or harassment at the university

		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Empathy	Between Groups	1.251	2	.626	2.393	.094
	Within Groups	55.153	211	.261		
	Total	56.404	213			
Self-awareness	Between Groups	.989	2	.495	2.286	.104
	Within Groups	45.639	211	.216		
	Total	46.628	213			
Social skills	Between Groups	1.068	2	.534	2.658	.072
	Within Groups	42.396	211	.201		
	Total	43.464	213			
Intrinsic motivation	Between Groups	1.537	2	.768	3.533	.031
	Within Groups	45.883	211	.217		
	Total	47.420	213			
Self-regulation	Between Groups	.906	2	.453	1.503	.225
	Within Groups	63.612	211	.301		
	Total	64.518	213			

Table 11 presents the one-way ANOVA test's detail to find the difference among the mean scores of empathy, self-awareness, social skills, intrinsic motivation, and self-regulation based on previous experience of students experiencing bullying, harassment or negative emotions at university. These perceptions were collected in five i.e. Empathy $F(2, 211) = 2.393, p = .094$; self-awareness $F(2, 211) = 2.286, p = .104$; social skills $F(2, 211) = 2.658, p = .072$; intrinsic motivation $F(2, 211) = 3.533, p = .031$ and self-regulation $F(2, 211) = 1.503, p = .225$. The results show no significant difference in scores of all five factors based on students facing emotions of bullying, harassment etc. Most of the students have the same perceptions regardless of their negative emotional experiences.

Discussion

The present study was an effort to investigate Pakistani university students' perceptions of emotional intelligence and

find the differences in their perception based on their gender, age, degree program, and experience of being a victim of bullying or harassment. Overall, the results showed no significant difference in students' perceptions of self-awareness, self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and social skills. Tariq, Majoka and Hussain (2011) proved the results and found that Pakistani university students perceived self-awareness, self-regulation and reading emotions are essential for them.

The present study has shown the difference in students' perception based on their gender aspect of empathy. We can find similar results in previous studies by Chaudhry, Ali, Sajjad and Ali (2013), Kant (2019); Bibi, Saqlain and Mussawar (2016). However, this result was contrary to Nasir and Masrur's (2010) finding who found no difference between female and male perceptions of emotional intelligence. Besides these results, the present study has revealed that Pakistani university students were well aware of emotional intelligence and its importance. Our educational institutions should offer workshops to teachers and students to inculcate emotional intelligence skills. Teachers should be trained in different emotional intelligence aspects because they are role models for young students. Teachers who control their emotions and are good at regulating their emotions are praised by students and try to imitate their behavior. It is also important to train university students on emotional intelligence as they have to enter professional life, which requires theoretical abilities and emotional intelligence.

Conclusion

From the study results, we can conclude that students perceive emotional intelligence as an important tool for their social, personal, and professional lives. The items with the highest scores obtained showed that students believed it is important to recognize others' feelings even by their facial expressions. Further, it

is significant to feel the pain of others and try to help them. It can enhance their relations with others. Moreover, the results reveal that if someone is being teased, he/she should take it as a challenge and control their negative feeling and alter them towards positive feelings of motivation and competition. They believe that individuals who can understand their own emotions and distinguish them have more control over emotions.

Most importantly, students perceive emotions to be more important than material things. The present study was significant as it highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence for students and related emotional intelligence with age, gender, degree program and experience of bullying or harassment in the Pakistani context. This research had some limitations, like respondents of the present study were from Karachi universities only, which was because of a lack of financial, time and human resources. Research can be done on students of schools and college level too.

Recommendations

More work is required in emotional intelligence related to parenting styles, tools and techniques to teach emotional intelligence elements, the impact of emotional intelligence on coping mechanisms related to testing anxiety, or how our existing education system helps students develop emotional intelligence. Researches in these areas can highlight the importance of emotional intelligence for teachers, parents, school management, and the education ministry.

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