Academic Motivation: How Fear of Negative Evaluation and Emotional Intelligence Play Their Role?

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to explore the factors that could influence academic motivation, i.e., fear of negative evaluation and emotional intelligence. Three scales namely, academic motivation scale, fear of negative evaluation and emotional intelligence were applied on 300 students enrolled in university of Peshawar in various programs. The age range of the sample was between 18-25 years (M=20.91; SD=1.87). The results confirmed the hypotheses suggesting significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and fear of negative evaluation, a positive impact of emotional intelligence on academic motivation as well as a positive correlation between fear of negative evaluation and academic motivation. The findings of the study suggest that educational programs should cater students' emotional intelligence that could both reduce evaluative anxiety and promote more adaptive academic motivation. Interventions can target mindfulness-based training, social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula, and cognitive-behavioral strategies for dealing with anxiety. Incorporation of these techniques may strengthen student' ability to encounter academic challenges with confidence, resilience, and intrinsic motivation.
Key words: Academic motivation, fear of negative evaluation, emotional intelligence

INTRODUCTION

Achieving academic success is dependent on many factors, cognitive abilities just comprise one aspect of it. The contemporary educational psychology, highlights emotional and motivational factors that relate with students' academic performance and psychological well-being. Apart from cognitive ability and instructional methods, focus is shifted to students' emotional experiences, self-perceptions, and interpersonal dynamics that equally play a critical role in educational outcomes (Pekrun et al., 2002; Linnenbrink-Garcia & Pekrun, 2011). The current study has focused attention on three interrelated psychological

constructs, namely, academic motivation, fear of negative evaluation (FNE), and emotional intelligence (EI) and their connection with students' learning.

Academic motivation, refers to a combination of both internal and/or external motives that lead students toward academic goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand et al., 1992). *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT) makes a difference between intrinsic motivation, that results from internal interest and enjoyment, and extrinsic motivation, that is directed by external rewards or pressures (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Kandavel and Vasudevan found that academic motivation enhances students' achievement. Yusuf (2011) suggested that intrinsic motivation enhances deeper learning, creativity, and long-term academic engagement, while, an overemphasis on extrinsic motivation, may promote surface learning and burnout. Chen et al. (2023) concluded that academic motivation reduces burnout. It should be kept in mind that motivational mechanisms do not function independently; they may be moderated or hampered by emotional and interpersonal dynamics within the academic environment. A related interpersonal factor that can affect academic motivation is *fear of evaluation*.

Fear of negative evaluation, is a basic element of social anxiety, that is a fear of being judged and/or criticized by others (Watson & Friend, 1969). Students showing this fear in academic contexts, show avoidance behaviors, reduced classroom participation, test anxiety, and diminished academic performance (Weeks et al., 2005; Leary, 1983). Fear of negative evaluation keeps students from asking questions due to fear of disapproval, avoiding facing feedback, or may impair their performance due to overpowering self-consciousness. This emotional suppression may kill intrinsic motivation and result in maladaptive academic patterns, specifically under evaluative or competitive learning environments (Rodebaugh et al., 2004; Clark & Wells, 1995). Toprak, Metin, and Ünalan (2023) found a significant negative association between academic motivation and fear of negative evaluation.

Emotional intelligence, by contrast, may serve as a protective factor against these challenges. Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to an ability of perceiving, understanding, managing, and regulating emotions in oneself and others (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). EI is considered as a foundational skill for academic and social accomplishment. Licona et al. (2020) found emotional intelligence as a significant positive predictor of academic performance. High EI is associated with better stress management, improved interpersonal relationships, and enhanced academic outcomes (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Parker et al., 2004a). Students showing high emotional intelligence manifest higher emotional resilience, motivation, and adaptability while facing academic pressures (Brackett et al., 2011; Qualter et al., 2009). Ambarwati (2018) found that emotional intelligence along with other factors had a significant positive impact on school students learning. Consequently, emotional intelligence can moderate the negative effects of fear of negative evaluation by fostering emotional self-awareness and reducing the intensity of social evaluation fears. Literature considers Emotional Intelligence (EI) an important aspect of fruitful learning, by managing academic stress, maintaining focus, and engaging in academic tasks (Parker et al., 2004b). Emotional intelligence can foster self-regulation, empathy, and social skills; aspects that aid students encounter the emotional toils which may arise in academic environments. These capabilities help students to maintain their poise while meeting academic challenges by maintaining intrinsic

motivation (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2012).

Rationale of the study

Research has been done on each of these constructs individually, but relatively few studies have investigated the interlink between academic motivation, fear of negative evaluation and emotional intelligence together. EI is a dynamic system that influences students' academic and emotional functioning. In the face of rising emotional demands put on students in educational settings, an urgent need arises to explore integrative frameworks that capture both motivational drivers and emotional competencies that impacts students learning. The present study aims to fill this gap by investigating the relationships among academic motivation, fear of negative evaluation, and emotional intelligence in a student sample; particularly exploring the impact of emotional intelligence and fear of negative evaluation on academic motivation and presenting EI as a viable intervention for promoting academic growth.

Objective

1. To investigate the relation between fear of negative evaluation, emotional intelligence and academic motivation.

Hypotheses

1. Higher scores on emotional intelligence will be inversely associated with fear of negative evaluation.
2. Fear of negative evaluation will have an impact on academic motivation.
3. Emotional intelligence will be positively associated with academic motivation

METHODOLOGY

Sample

In the present study, participants were chosen through convenience sampling from different departments within Peshawar university. The final sample comprised a total of 300 participants, including 190 males and 110 females. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 25 years (M=20.91; SD=1.87). All participants were undergraduate students enrolled in full-time academic programs.

Instruments

Academic Motivation Scale (AMS)

The Academic Motivation Scale consist of 28 statements related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation about academic endeavors. Based on theory of motivation (Vallerand et al., 1992), it consists of Likert format with 5 response options ranging from 1 to 5. Individuals scoring high on the scale indicate greater academic motivation. The scale demonstrates strong internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.85).

Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNE)

Developed by Watson and Friend, (1969) the scale measures anxiety of about being negatively evaluated by others. The statements measure both the cognitive and behavioral factors of evaluation apprehensions. Based on Likert format with 5 options, the score range between 1 to 5. Higher the score the more the fear of being negatively evaluated. The reliability of the scale shows good internal consistency (r = 0.78).

Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS)

Comprised of 40 statements the EIS measures "emotional awareness, regulation, and social skills" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). With a Likert format respondents

need to mark their answer on a 5 point scale, where "Never true of me" =1 and "Always true of me" stands for 5. The scale shows high Cronbach's α (0.87). the higher summed score depicts more emotional intelligence.

Procedure
The study employed a correlational research design with data collected through convenience sampling from different universities and colleges of Peshawar. A dual data collection was used to gather, i.e., 243 forms were physically administered and 57 responded via online platform. The participants were assured about confidentiality of their data and that their data will only be used for research purpose. Upon completion, all respondents were thanked for their valuable contribution to the study. This mixed-method approach facilitated broader participation while maintaining data quality standards.

RESULTS

Table 1
Demographic Characteristic of the Sample

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Male	190	60.5
Female	110	35.0
Qualification		
Matric	3	1.0
Fsc /fa	60	19.1
Bsc/Ba	232	73.9
Others	5	1.6
Age		
18-20	129	40.0
21-23	164	52.2
24-25	7	2.2

Note. n = 300, % = percentage.

Table 2
Psychometric Properties For FNE, AMS, EISA

Scale	No of item	*M*	*SD*	Range	*α*
FNE	12	33.12	6.06	20-54	.60
AMS	28	85.21	15.29	50-125	.84
EISA	40	95.30	22.63	28-148	.89

Note: FNE= fear of negative evaluation , AMS= academic motivation scale, EISA= Emotional intelligence self assessment , M=mean , SD=standard deviation, α= cronbach`s alpha.

Table 2 presents the psychometric properties of the FNE, AMS, and EISA scales. All three scales demonstrate acceptable to excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .60 (FNE) to .89 (EISA). This indicates that the scales are generally reliable for assessing fear of negative evaluation, academic motivation, and emotional intelligence.

Table 3
Correlation Between Emotional Intelligence and Fear of Negative Evaluation Scales

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2
EISA	95.1	22.6	-	

FNE	33.1	6.01	-0.89*	-

Note. n = sample size, M = mean, SD = standard deviation .EISA= emotional intelligence self assessment scale, FNE= fear of negative evaluation. *p < 0.05.

Table 3 shows a strong negative correlation (r = -0.89) between Emotional Intelligence (EISA) and Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), which is statistically significant at the .01 level. This indicates that as emotional intelligence increases, fear of negative evaluation significantly decreases.

Table 4

Simple Linear Regression Showing the impact of Fear of Negative Evaluation on Academic Motivation

	B	SE	B	T	p
Constant	67.07	4.78		14.00	.000
FNE	.54	.14	.21	3.85	.000
R^2	.048				

Note: B= unstandardized coefficient , SE= Standard error , β= standardized coefficient(Beta) , t= statistical significance,FNE= fear of negative evaluation

According to Table 4 the value of R^2 is .048, which means 4.8% of the variation in academic motivation is explained by fear of negative evaluation. The value of the regression coefficient (B = .21) indicates that for every one-unit increase in fear of negative evaluation, academic motivation increases by 0.21 units, showing a small but significant positive relationship.

Table 5

Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Academic Motivation

Variables	M	SD	1	2
EISA	95.1	22.6	-	
AMS	85.21	15.29	.363**	-

Note: EISA= emotional intelligence self assessment scale , AMS= academic motivation scale , *p <.01.

The table 5 shows a positive correlation (r = .363, p < .01) between Emotional Intelligence and Academic Motivation which is significant at .01 This suggests that higher emotional intelligence is moderately associated with higher academic motivation among the participants, which means increase in emotional intelligence will also increase academic motivation.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the relationships among emotional intelligence, fear of negative evaluation, and academic motivation in a student population. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the instruments demonstrating that the scales employed in the current study demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency (0.60 to 0.89).

The results proved the first hypothesis which posited an inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and fear of negative evaluation (r = -0.89, p < .01), indicating that students with higher emotional intelligence experience substantially lower levels of evaluative fear. Ironuo and Nwosu (2024) studied emotional intelligence and fear of negative evaluation among Nigerian university students and found a significant but small contribution on EI in FNE. Salovey and Mayer, (1990) and Brackett et al., (2011) suggested high scorers on emotional intelligence show greater self-awareness, emotional regulation, and

social perception skills which keeps them from anxiety driven by evaluation. The stronger correlation attained in the present study suggest that emotional intelligence may serve as a resilience boosting mechanism, decreasing self-doubt and evaluation apprehension in academic scenarios. Mayer and Salovey's (1997) theoretical model of Emotional Intelligence has already emphasized that the emotional clarity and emotional regulation helps in social-emotional encounters and management of stress.

The second hypothesis studied the impact of Fear of Negative Evaluation on academic motivation. Simple regression analysis was carried out to see the results which revealed a significant positive predictive relationship (β = 0.21, p < .001), meaning that fear of judgment increases academic motivation in students. Downing et al., (2020) studied FNE and anxiety in community college students related to science subjects and found that FNE was a basic underlying reason for anxiety among students. They also revealed that FNE may have a positive impact on students by enhancing their desire for learning the course material but may also have a negative influence on students through decreasing their self-perception about their intelligence and may impact their scientific ability in solving and articulating the science problems. This may be the result of extrinsic factors such as, avoiding failure and/or disapproval. Kocovski and Endler, (2000) also found Fear of Negative Evaluation may generate performance oriented motives that are based on social comparison and anxiety (Leary, 1983). Ryan and Deci, (2000) stated that this kind of motivation may work temporarily by enhancing academic striving, but is aimed at surface-level learning, and leads to emotional exhaustion, or burnout over time. As mentioned above, the result show that Fear of Negative Evaluation might increase academic motivation but it does so in maladaptive ways, ignoring the difference between quality and quantity of work generated through motivation.

The third hypothesis was also supported by the results, manifesting significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic motivation (r = 0.36, p < .01). Earlier studies have also shown that students high on emotional intelligence show high scores on intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and perseverance when facing academic challenges (Parker et al., 2004b; Qualter et al., 2009). Tang and He (2023) studied emotional intelligence and learning motivation among students during COVID-19 along with mediating roles of self-efficacy and self-support and found a significant positive impact of emotional intelligence on learning motivation. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985), suggests that emotional intelligence can foster the sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness: factors that are considered responsible for high-quality motivation. Emotionally intelligent students are more likely to engage in reflective goal-setting, constructive self-talk, and effective stress coping strategies, all of which promote sustained academic engagement.

Similarly, the *Limited Strength Model of Self-Regulation* (Baumeister et al., 2016) postulates that emotional self-regulation is among finite cognitive resources; as emotional intelligence may safeguard these limited resources through decreasing reactive anxiety, keeping the capacity for academic endeavors. Likewise, the *Broaden-and-Build Theory* (Fredrickson, 2001) suggests that positive emotional states are fostered by emotional intelligence that broaden focus and cognitive ability, resulting in persistent personal mechanisms like, academic persistence and confidence.

Conclusion

To summarize, the findings show a dynamic interplay between emotional intelligence, evaluation anxiety, and academic motivation. Emotional Intelligence reduces the negative effect of fear of negative evaluation while at the same time increasing academic motivation. Additionally, fear of negative evaluation stimulates academic effort but through anxiety-driven mechanisms that are not conducive for emotional well-being. The findings suggest the importance of fostering emotional competencies in students to reduce stress as well as enhance adaptive forms of academic motivation. Empirical research supports strong connections between these psychological factors and academic performance, as students with higher academic motivation demonstrated greater persistence, deeper engagement in learning, and better overall achievement (Vallerand et al., 1992). Instead, motivation independently does not account for success—students with high fear of negative evaluation (FNE) may find it hard to participate, avoid challenges, and may underperform due to anxiety of being judged (Watson & Friend, 1969). FNE can further lead to procrastination, reduction in self-efficacy, and impair test performance (Leary, 1983). Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a moderating role in this dynamic like, students high on EI may also experience fear of negative evaluation but utilize coping mechanisms to remain motivated, as compared to the one with low EI who may become overwhelmed resulting in disengagement. The interaction between these variables is interesting; high academic motivation cum low EI may lead to burnout, due to lack of emotional regulation. Conversely, high scores on EI can also reduce the negative influence of FNE, by keeping students resilient in the face of evaluation pressures (Parker et al., 2004b). Likewise, high scorers on intrinsic motivation may produce better results when they also score high on EI, because they will sustain effort in setbacks (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The rise of social media has further intensified the competitive academic environments and social comparison. Students today face constant evaluation—whether through grades, peer feedback, or social media—making fear of negative evaluation more pervasive. Those with higher EI are better equipped to navigate these pressures, while those with low EI may resort to avoidance or self-sabotage.

Limitations and Suggestions

A correlational research design restricts causal interpretation of the observed relationships which can be studied in experimental studies in future. Likewise situational tests can study the variable of fear of negative evaluation more effectively than a self-report measure. Incorporation of teacher evaluations, and academic records should also be included for a better understanding of the variables. The study did not rule out any prior experience with emotional intelligence training or psychological interventions which may serve as a confounding variable.

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