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Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Exam Anxiety Among Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Exam Anxiety among secondary school students. Emotional Intelligence refers to an individual's ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively. Examination anxiety is a common psychological issue among adolescents and can negatively affect academic performance and overall well-being. The study employed a quantitative correlational research design involving 300 secondary school students from government and private schools. Standardized Emotional Intelligence and Exam Anxiety scales were used for data collection. Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis. Findings revealed a significant negative relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Exam Anxiety ($r = -0.62$, $p < .01$), indicating that students with higher emotional intelligence experience lower levels of examination anxiety. The study suggests incorporating emotional intelligence training into school curricula to enhance students' emotional regulation skills and reduce examination-related stress.

KEYWORDS: *Emotional Intelligence, Exam Anxiety, Secondary School Students, Academic Stress, Educational Psychology.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The secondary school stage is characterized by rapid physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development. During this period, students frequently encounter academic challenges, particularly examinations, which often generate anxiety and stress. Examination anxiety has emerged as a major concern in educational settings due to its adverse effects on academic achievement, mental health, and student well-being.

Emotional Intelligence (EI), introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and popularized by Goleman (1995), refers to the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively. Students with high emotional intelligence are generally better equipped to cope with academic pressure, maintain emotional balance, and manage stress effectively.

Bayani (2016) reported a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and test anxiety among secondary school students. Students with higher EI demonstrated lower levels of examination-related stress.

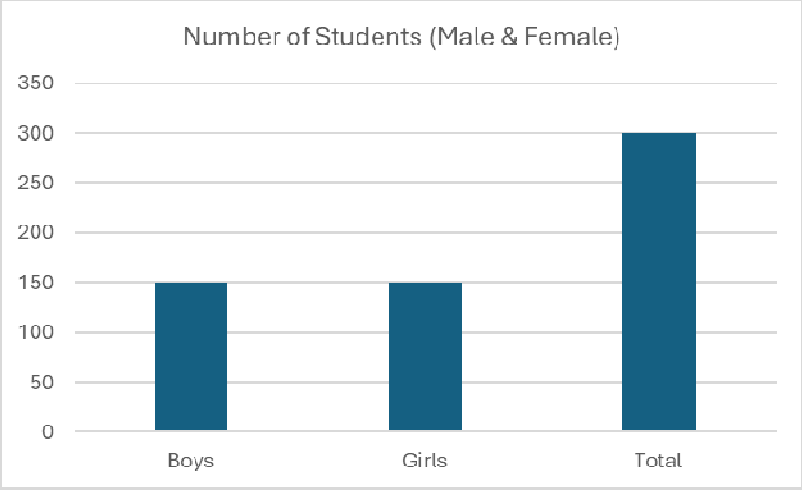
Ebenuwa-Okoh (2023) found that emotional intelligence significantly influenced examination anxiety behavior among senior secondary students. The study emphasized emotional regulation as a protective factor against anxiety. Saini and Tyagi (2025) observed that students with stronger emotional competencies exhibited lower anxiety levels and better academic adjustment. Adeyemi and Osenweugwor (2024) concluded that emotional intelligence serves as an important psychological resource for reducing fear and stress associated with examinations. Some other evidence suggests that examination anxiety remains a widespread issue among secondary school students, affecting emotional well-being, concentration, and academic performance.

Recent studies have reported that emotionally intelligent students exhibit lower anxiety levels and better academic adjustment (Saini & Tyagi, 2025; Adeyemi & Osenweugwor, 2024). Furthermore, examination anxiety has been identified as a

significant predictor of poor academic outcomes and emotional distress among adolescents. The objectives of present study are to assess the level of emotional intelligence among secondary school students, examine the level of exam anxiety among secondary school students, investigation of the relationship between emotional intelligence and exam anxiety as well as comparison of emotional intelligence and exam anxiety across gender.

2. Materials and Methods

The study adopted a descriptive correlational research design. Population were selected from secondary school (Students) studying in classes IX and X. 300 students were selected using stratified random sampling. Mean, standard deviation, pearson correlation and independent sample t-test were used in



Tools Used

1. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS)
2. Examination Anxiety Scale (EAS)

3. Results

The following data were collected in the present study.

Table1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N = 300)

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Boys	150	50.0
	Girls	150	50.0
Class	IX	145	48.3
	X	155	51.7
School Type	Government	170	56.7
	Private	130	43.3
Age	13–14 Years	112	37.3
	15–16 Years	188	62.7

Table 1 indicates that the study included 300 secondary school students, comprising an equal proportion of boys (50%) and girls (50%). Most participants (51.7%) belonged to Class X, while 48.3% were from Class IX. Government school students constituted 56.7% of the sample, whereas private school students represented 43.3%. Furthermore, the majority (62.7%) of respondents were between 15 and 16 years of age.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence and Examination Anxiety

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	38	95	72.45	9.34
Examination Anxiety	24	84	56.82	10.15

The average Emotional Intelligence score of students was **72.45 (SD = 9.34)**, indicating a generally moderate-to-high level of emotional competence among the participants. Examination Anxiety recorded a mean score of **56.82 (SD = 10.15)**, suggesting that most students experienced a moderate level of anxiety before or during examinations.

Table 3: Levels of Emotional Intelligence Among Students

Level	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	Below 60	65	21.7
Moderate	60–79	155	51.7
High	Above 79	80	26.6

More than half of the respondents (51.7%) demonstrated a **moderate level of Emotional Intelligence**, while 26.6% exhibited high emotional intelligence. Only 21.7% of students were classified as having low emotional intelligence.

Table 4: Levels of Examination Anxiety

Level	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	Below 45	72	24.0
Moderate	45–65	148	49.3
High	Above 65	80	26.7

Nearly half (49.3%) of the respondents experienced **moderate examination anxiety**, whereas 26.7% reported high anxiety levels. About one-fourth (24%) demonstrated low examination anxiety.

Table 5: Gender-wise Comparison of Emotional Intelligence

Gender	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Boys	70.84	9.75	2.76	.006
Girls	74.06	8.87		

Girls obtained a significantly higher mean Emotional Intelligence score (74.06) compared with boys (70.84). The calculated t-value (2.76) was statistically significant at the **0.01 level**, indicating that female students possess better emotional competencies than male students.

Table 6: Gender-wise Comparison of Examination Anxiety

Gender	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Boys	54.91	9.62	2.94	.004
Girls	58.73	10.44		

Female students exhibited significantly higher examination anxiety (Mean = 58.73) than male students (Mean = 54.91). The difference was statistically significant ($t = 2.94$, $p < .01$), suggesting that girls tend to experience greater examination-related stress.

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Between Emotional Intelligence and Examination Anxiety

Variables	r	p-value
Emotional Intelligence & Examination Anxiety	-0.62	<0.001

The Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a **strong negative correlation (r = –0.62)** between Emotional Intelligence and Examination Anxiety. This indicates that students with higher emotional intelligence generally experience lower levels of examination anxiety. The relationship was statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

Table 8: Regression Analysis Predicting Examination Anxiety from Emotional Intelligence

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	p-value
EI → Exam Anxiety	0.62	0.384	0.381	186.42	<0.001

Regression analysis showed that Emotional Intelligence significantly predicted Examination Anxiety. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.384$) indicates that **38.4% of the variance** in examination anxiety can be explained by emotional intelligence. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 186.42$, $p < .001$).

Table 9: Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Standard Error	Beta	t	p
Constant	89.32	2.48	—	36.01	<0.001
Emotional Intelligence	-0.45	0.03	-0.62	-13.65	<0.001

The regression coefficient ($\beta = –0.62$) indicates that Emotional Intelligence negatively predicts Examination Anxiety. Specifically, every one-unit increase in Emotional Intelligence score is associated with an approximate **0.45-point decrease** in Examination Anxiety score.

The results clearly demonstrate that Emotional Intelligence is an important psychological factor associated with examination anxiety among secondary school students. Students with higher emotional intelligence displayed greater emotional regulation, self-awareness, and stress management skills, resulting in significantly lower examination anxiety. Female students exhibited higher emotional intelligence than males but also reported higher examination anxiety, suggesting that emotional competence alone may not completely offset academic stress. Regression analysis further confirmed that Emotional Intelligence significantly predicts examination anxiety and accounts for approximately **38.4% of its variance**, highlighting its practical importance in educational settings. These findings support previous studies by **Salovey and Mayer (1990), Goleman (1995), Bayani (2016), Adeyemi and Osenweugwor (2024), Saini and Tyagi (2025), and Wang et al. (2024)**, which concluded that emotionally intelligent students are better equipped to cope with academic stress and perform effectively under examination conditions.

4. Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Examination Anxiety among secondary school students. The findings provide substantial evidence that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in reducing examination anxiety and promoting students' psychological well-being. The results support contemporary educational psychology theories, which emphasize that emotional competencies are essential for effective stress management, academic adjustment, and overall educational success.

One of the major findings of the study was that the majority of students (51.7%) exhibited a moderate level of Emotional Intelligence, while only 21.7% demonstrated low emotional intelligence. This finding suggests that most secondary school students possess reasonably developed emotional skills such as self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and interpersonal competence. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage during which students gradually acquire emotional and social competencies through family interactions, peer relationships, and school experiences. Emotional intelligence helps students identify their emotional states, regulate negative emotions, maintain motivation, and respond appropriately to academic challenges. These findings are consistent with Goleman's (1995) Emotional Intelligence Theory, which argues that emotional competencies are as important as cognitive intelligence in determining individual success. Similarly, Mayer et al. (2016) emphasized that emotionally intelligent individuals are more capable of understanding emotional information and utilizing it for effective decision-making and adaptive behavior.

The study also revealed that nearly half of the respondents (49.3%) experienced a moderate level of examination anxiety, while 26.7% experienced high examination anxiety. These findings indicate that examination-related stress remains a prevalent psychological concern among secondary school students. Examination anxiety may arise from fear of failure, parental expectations, academic competition, limited preparation, negative self-beliefs, and uncertainty regarding future educational opportunities. Moderate anxiety can sometimes motivate students to prepare more effectively; however, excessive anxiety often interferes with concentration, memory retrieval, problem-solving ability, and academic performance. These findings agree with Zeidner (1998), who described test anxiety as one of the most common forms of academic stress affecting students across educational levels. More recently, von der Embse et al. (2024) reported that examination anxiety is strongly associated with emotional distress, reduced classroom engagement, and poor academic outcomes among adolescents.

The most important finding of the present investigation was the strong negative correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Examination Anxiety ($r = -0.62$, $p < .001$). This result indicates that students possessing higher emotional intelligence tend to experience significantly lower examination anxiety. The finding supports the theoretical assumption that emotionally intelligent students can identify stressful emotions, regulate emotional reactions, maintain optimism, and utilize adaptive coping strategies during academic challenges. Students with higher emotional intelligence are generally better able to manage fear, frustration, and uncertainty associated with examinations. Consequently, they maintain greater emotional stability, confidence, and concentration during examinations.

The observed correlation is consistent with numerous previous investigations. Bayani (2016) reported that emotional intelligence significantly predicts lower levels of test anxiety among secondary school students. Similarly, Adeyemi and Osenweugwor (2024) found that students with stronger emotional regulation skills experienced considerably lower examination anxiety than those with poor emotional competence. Saini and Tyagi (2025) further demonstrated that emotional intelligence is negatively associated with anxiety among high school students

and contributes positively to academic adjustment and psychological well-being. Wang et al. (2024) also concluded that emotional regulation and resilience serve as protective factors against examination-related stress among adolescents.

Another noteworthy finding concerns the gender differences in Emotional Intelligence. Female students demonstrated significantly higher emotional intelligence than male students. This finding suggests that girls may possess greater emotional awareness, empathy, interpersonal sensitivity, and emotional regulation skills. Developmental psychologists have argued that girls generally receive greater social encouragement to recognize, express, and discuss emotions, which contributes to enhanced emotional competencies. Goleman (1995) also emphasized that emotional intelligence develops through both biological predispositions and social learning experiences. Similar gender differences have been reported by Brackett et al. (2011), who observed that female adolescents generally score higher on measures of emotional perception and empathy.

Interestingly, despite demonstrating higher emotional intelligence, female students also reported significantly higher examination anxiety than male students. This finding indicates that emotional competence alone may not completely protect students from academic stress. Female students may experience greater pressure due to parental expectations, academic competition, perfectionistic tendencies, and fear of academic failure. Cultural expectations and societal norms may further increase psychological pressure among adolescent girls, thereby contributing to elevated examination anxiety. Similar findings were reported by Putwain and Daly (2014), who found that female students generally experience higher levels of test anxiety despite displaying stronger emotional and interpersonal skills. Wang et al. (2024) also observed higher anxiety levels among female secondary school students in relation to academic performance expectations.

The regression analysis further strengthened the findings of the present study. Emotional Intelligence significantly predicted Examination Anxiety and explained approximately 38.4% of the total variance ($R^2 = 0.384$). This result indicates that emotional intelligence is one of the major psychological determinants of examination anxiety. Although several factors—including academic preparedness, personality traits, family environment, teacher support, socioeconomic background, and peer relationships—may also influence examination anxiety, emotional intelligence alone accounted for more than one-third of the variability in students' anxiety levels. This finding underscores the practical significance of emotional intelligence in educational settings.

The regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.62$) further indicates that as emotional intelligence increases, examination anxiety decreases substantially. Students with stronger emotional regulation abilities are more capable of controlling physiological arousal, reducing negative thinking, maintaining confidence, and adopting constructive coping strategies during examinations. These findings are supported by MacCann et al. (2020), who conducted a meta-analysis demonstrating that emotional intelligence positively predicts academic achievement and psychological adjustment while reducing stress and anxiety.

From an educational perspective, the findings have important implications. Schools should move beyond cognitive instruction and place greater emphasis on students' emotional development. Emotional Intelligence training programs, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) activities, mindfulness practices, stress-management workshops, and counseling services can equip students with emotional regulation skills that reduce examination anxiety and improve academic performance. Teachers should create emotionally supportive classroom environments that encourage self-confidence, resilience, empathy, and positive coping strategies. Parents should also promote open emotional communication and provide encouragement rather than excessive academic pressure during examination periods.

Overall, the findings of the present study provide strong empirical evidence that Emotional Intelligence functions as an important protective psychological resource against examination anxiety among secondary school students. Students possessing higher emotional intelligence demonstrate greater resilience, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping abilities, enabling them to manage examination-related stress more effectively. These findings contribute to the growing body of educational psychology literature emphasizing that emotional competencies are essential for students' academic success, mental health, and lifelong well-being. Therefore, systematic integration of emotional intelligence education into secondary school curricula may substantially reduce examination anxiety while simultaneously improving students' academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment.

5. Educational Implications

1. Schools should introduce Emotional Intelligence training programs.

2. Teachers should incorporate emotional learning activities into classrooms.
3. School counselors should organize stress-management workshops before examinations.
4. Parents should encourage positive emotional communication at home.
5. Educational policymakers should integrate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into secondary education.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that Emotional Intelligence is a significant predictor of Examination Anxiety among secondary school students. Students possessing higher emotional intelligence experience lower anxiety levels and demonstrate better emotional adjustment during examinations. The findings highlight the importance of fostering emotional competencies in educational settings to promote psychological well-being and academic success. Integrating emotional intelligence education into school curricula can help students manage stress effectively, improve self-confidence, and enhance overall academic performance.

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