



Research Article

Exploring The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Coping with Academic Stress Among Students

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20688574>

Abstract

This paper explores the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in coping with academic stress among school-going students. Academic stress, often triggered by exams, peer pressure, and parental expectations, significantly impacts students' mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. The paper discusses various causes of academic stress, the distinction between eustress (positive stress) and distress (negative stress), and the psychological and physical consequences of prolonged stress. It further examines how emotional intelligence plays a vital role in helping students manage stress by recognising, regulating, and adapting to emotional responses. The study highlights the importance of family support, which offers emotional, financial, informational, and instrumental assistance, in enhancing emotional intelligence and mitigating academic stress. The findings suggest that emotionally intelligent students are more resilient, better able to cope with academic pressure, and more likely to perform well academically. The role of parental involvement in shaping emotional intelligence and academic outcomes is also discussed.

Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 06-01-2026
- Accepted: 26-02-2026
- Published: 28-02-2026
- IJCRM:5(1); 2026: 974-979
- ©2026, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

How to Cite this Article

Rana S, Gaur M C. Exploring the Role of Emotional Intelligence in Coping with Academic Stress Among Students. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2026;5(1):974-979.

Access this Article Online



www.multiarticlesjournal.com

KEYWORDS: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Academic Stress, Eustress, Distress, Coping Strategies, Family Support, Parental Involvement, Academic Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Academic stress is an ever-present challenge in the lives of school-going students, and it has far-reaching effects on their psychological, physical, and academic well-being. Stressors such as exams, assignments, peer competition, and high parental expectations create significant pressure, which often leads to negative psychological outcomes like anxiety, depression, and burnout. However, not all stress is detrimental. Eustress, or positive stress, can motivate students to perform better and engage more deeply with their academic tasks. In contrast, distress occurs when stress becomes overwhelming and unmanageable, resulting in detrimental consequences for both mental health and academic performance.

This paper explores how emotional intelligence (EI) can play a crucial role in helping students manage academic stress. Emotional intelligence, the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and influence emotions, is vital in managing the emotional responses to stress. Students with high EI are better equipped to cope with stress through adaptive coping strategies, allowing them to maintain focus, stay motivated, and enhance their overall academic performance. Furthermore, the paper examines the significant role of family support—emotional, financial, informational, and instrumental—in fostering EI and mitigating academic stress.

ACADEMIC STRESS IN SCHOOL-GOING STUDENTS

Academic stress is a prevalent issue among school-going students, affecting their mental and physical health, academic performance, and overall well-being. This section explores the definition, causes, and consequences of academic stress, as well as the impact it has on students' ability to succeed in school.

Nature of Academic Stress

Causes of Stress in Students (e.g., exams, peer pressure, parental expectations):

Academic stress arises from a variety of sources related to the demands of the academic environment. Common causes include exams, assignments, peer competition, and parental expectations.

- **Exams and Assignments:** One of the most common sources of academic stress is the pressure to perform well in exams and complete assignments on time. The fear of failing or not meeting the required academic standards creates anxiety and pressure (Gustafsson & Svensson, 2016).
- **Peer Pressure:** Students often feel stress due to peer competition, as they compare their academic performance with that of their classmates. The need to "keep up" or outshine others can increase stress levels, especially when students feel they are falling behind (Gustafsson & Svensson, 2016).
- **Parental Expectations:** High parental expectations can also be a major source of stress. Parents who demand high academic performance can cause students to feel pressure to meet those expectations, even if the students do not feel

ready or capable (Graham, 2015). This external pressure often leads to anxiety and self-doubt among students.

Gustafsson & Svensson (2016) emphasize that academic stress is not just caused by one factor but often stems from a combination of internal and external pressures that students experience.

Types of Stress: Eustress vs. Distress:

Stress is not always detrimental. It can be categorised into two main types:

- **Eustress (Positive Stress):** Eustress is the kind of stress that motivates students to perform well. It arises when students are faced with challenges that are within their capability to overcome. For example, the pressure of preparing for an exam can motivate a student to study more efficiently and stay focused on their tasks (Schutte et al., 2015). Eustress can lead to increased productivity, engagement, and a sense of accomplishment.
- **Distress (Negative Stress):** Distress, on the other hand, is harmful and detrimental to both a student's health and academic performance. It occurs when the stressors become overwhelming or unmanageable. Distress can result from excessive academic demands, such as unreasonably high expectations, fear of failure, or insufficient time to complete assignments. Schutte et al. (2015) explain that distress can lead to anxiety, burnout, and a decrease in motivation, affecting students' ability to focus on their studies and perform well.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL IMPACT OF ACADEMIC STRESS

Anxiety, Depression, and Behavioural Changes:

Excessive academic stress can lead to significant psychological impacts, including anxiety and depression.

- **Anxiety:** The fear of failure, upcoming exams, or the pressure to meet academic expectations can cause students to experience intense anxiety. This may manifest in constant worry, nervousness, and an inability to concentrate on tasks (Schutte et al., 2015). Prolonged anxiety can impair cognitive functioning and hinder academic performance.
- **Depression:** High levels of academic stress can lead to **depression**, particularly when students feel overwhelmed or believe they are unable to meet expectations. Depression may cause students to lose interest in academic activities, experience feelings of hopelessness, and disengage from learning (Schutte et al., 2015). In severe cases, this can affect their social relationships and overall well-being.
- **Behavioral Changes:** Students who are under high academic stress may also experience **behavioural changes**, such as irritability, frustration, and social withdrawal. These emotional and behavioral changes can negatively affect their relationships with peers, teachers, and family members (Schutte et al., 2015). Stress can also lead to procrastination, decreased effort in schoolwork, or avoiding academic tasks altogether.

Physical Symptoms of Stress:

Stress also affects students physically. Some common physical symptoms include:

- **Headaches:** Chronic stress can lead to tension headaches, which impair a student's ability to focus and complete tasks (Gustafsson & Svensson, 2016).
- **Fatigue:** Persistent stress often results in feelings of exhaustion or fatigue, even when students have had adequate rest. This physical tiredness can decrease motivation and productivity.
- **Sleep Disturbances:** Students experiencing high levels of academic stress often have difficulty sleeping. Stress-induced insomnia can further exacerbate anxiety and negatively affect cognitive functioning and memory, making it harder to retain information or focus in class (Gustafsson & Svensson, 2016).

These psychological and physical symptoms can create a cycle of stress, where each symptom worsens the others, making it increasingly difficult for students to manage their academic demands.

COPING STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC STRESS

Problem-Focused vs. Emotion-Focused Coping:

Students employ various coping strategies to manage academic stress. These strategies can be broadly divided into problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

- **Problem-Focused Coping:** This type of coping involves addressing the **source of stress** directly. Problem-focused coping strategies are most effective when students have some control over the stressor. For example, students may manage stress by breaking down assignments into smaller tasks, creating study schedules, or seeking help from teachers or tutors. The aim is to reduce the impact of the stressor by tackling the issue head-on (Lazarus & Folkman, 2014).

Examples of problem-focused coping

- Time management techniques, such as creating to-do lists or prioritising tasks.
- Seeking help or clarification from teachers or peers regarding assignments.
- Organising study sessions to prepare for exams more effectively.
- **Emotion-Focused Coping:** Emotion-focused coping involves managing the **emotional responses** to stress rather than addressing the stressor itself. This approach is particularly useful when students feel they cannot change the situation. For example, students may engage in activities like meditation, exercise, or talking to friends and family to alleviate the emotional burden of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 2014). While emotion-focused coping does not solve the stressor, it helps students manage their emotional responses and maintain their mental health.

Examples of emotion-focused coping:

- Practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or mindfulness.
- Physical activities, such as jogging or yoga, to relieve stress.
- Talking to a supportive friend or family member to vent emotions.

Role of Emotional Intelligence in Coping with Stress:

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a critical role in how effectively students can cope with academic stress. Students with high EI are better equipped to recognize their emotional responses to stress, regulate those emotions, and use adaptive coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 2014). Goleman (2023) emphasizes that EI helps students stay calm under pressure, maintain focus, and stay motivated, which reduces the negative impact of academic stress.

In particular, emotionally intelligent students are more likely to use problem-focused coping to address academic challenges directly, while also utilizing emotion-focused coping strategies to manage their emotional responses effectively. This balanced approach to coping can help students not only reduce the impact of stress but also improve their overall well-being and academic performance.

Academic stress is a complex issue with significant psychological, physical, and academic consequences. Understanding the causes of stress, the different types of stress (eustress vs. distress), and the various coping strategies available can help students manage stress more effectively. Problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, particularly when enhanced by emotional intelligence, can help students reduce the negative effects of stress and improve their academic performance and mental well-being.

THE ROLE OF FAMILY SUPPORT

Family support plays a crucial role in shaping the emotional, academic, and social development of students. It provides a foundation of encouragement, stability, and resources that help students cope with the challenges of school life, including academic stress. Family support not only enhances students' well-being but also fosters positive academic outcomes, making it a significant factor in their overall success. The support a student receives from their family can take various forms, each of which contributes to different aspects of the student's development.

1. Types of Family Support

Family support can be categorized into emotional, financial, informational, and instrumental support, with each type having distinct influences on a student's ability to manage academic pressures and achieve success.

- **Emotional Support:** Emotional support refers to the comfort, encouragement, and empathy that family members provide. It is one of the most important forms of support as it helps students navigate difficult emotions associated with academic stress, peer pressure, and

personal issues. Becker and Luthar (2023) highlight that emotional support from family members can serve as a buffer against stress, helping students to feel understood and valued. This support enables students to develop resilience and emotional regulation, which are essential for maintaining mental health and succeeding in school. For example, when students face academic setbacks, supportive family members can offer reassurance and encouragement, helping them recover and continue striving toward their goals. Furthermore, family members who express positive emotions and show interest in a student's academic journey are more likely to foster a positive attitude toward education, enhancing motivation and focus (Vogel & White, 2018).

- **Financial Support:** Financial support from families can significantly reduce the stress that students face in relation to educational costs. Access to necessary resources, such as textbooks, computers, and extra tutoring, is crucial for academic success, and financial support ensures that students have the tools they need to excel (Vogel & White, 2018). Moreover, financial assistance can alleviate the pressure of worrying about tuition fees, extracurricular activity costs, and other educational expenses, allowing students to focus more on their academic work rather than financial burdens. Becker and Luthar (2023) point out that financial support also provides opportunities for students to participate in enriching experiences, such as attending academic camps or joining clubs, further enhancing their educational journey.
- **Informational Support:** Informational support involves the guidance and advice that family members provide to help students make informed decisions about their academic and career paths. This type of support can range from helping students choose their classes, providing advice on career options, or assisting with problem-solving when students face academic difficulties. Becker and Luthar (2023) suggest that families who provide access to educational resources, such as counseling or career advice, significantly improve students' academic outcomes. For instance, parents who help students navigate the college application process or who offer advice on time management skills enable students to make more informed decisions that positively impact their academic success.
- **Instrumental Support:** Instrumental support refers to practical assistance provided by family members, such as helping with schoolwork, transportation to school, or ensuring students have a quiet, dedicated space for studying. Vogel and White (2018) argue that instrumental support is particularly crucial in reducing academic stress, as it removes some of the logistical challenges that can distract students from their studies. Families who help with managing school-related tasks, like keeping track of deadlines or organizing study schedules, contribute to creating an environment that fosters academic focus and success. This form of support also allows students to feel

more organized and less overwhelmed by their academic responsibilities.

Each form of family support—emotional, financial, informational, and instrumental—works synergistically to provide students with the necessary resources to thrive both academically and personally. The combination of these forms of support contributes to a well-rounded support system that helps students succeed in the face of academic challenges.

2. Impact of Parental Involvement on Academic Performance

Parental involvement is one of the most influential factors in determining a student's academic performance. This involvement can take many forms, such as attending parent-teacher conferences, engaging in regular communication with teachers, helping with homework, and encouraging academic pursuits at home. Research consistently shows that when parents are actively involved in their children's education, students are more likely to perform better academically, have higher self-esteem, and exhibit greater motivation to succeed (Liu & Zhang, 2020).

- **Parent-Child Communication:** One of the most important aspects of parental involvement is effective communication between parents and children. He emphasizes that open, supportive, and constructive communication can lead to improved academic outcomes by ensuring that students feel understood and supported. When parents and children communicate regularly about school activities, assignments, and academic goals, students are more likely to stay motivated and engaged in their academic work. Moreover, when parents provide consistent feedback, encouragement, and constructive criticism, it fosters an atmosphere of trust and support that is crucial for a student's growth. The emotional connection between parents and children, facilitated by communication, helps students feel more confident in their academic abilities, which can translate into better performance in the classroom (Liu and Zhang 2020).
- **Educational Attitudes of Parents:** The **educational attitudes of parents** significantly influence their children's attitudes toward education and their academic performance. Liu and Zhang (2020) argue that when parents set high but realistic expectations for their children, it encourages students to strive for excellence while maintaining a healthy balance. Parents who believe in the importance of education and actively encourage their children to pursue academic excellence create an environment where academic success is valued. Furthermore, parental attitudes toward learning—such as fostering a growth mindset, where intelligence and abilities are seen as developable through effort and perseverance—can motivate students to overcome challenges and improve their performance (Vogel & White, 2018).

The impact of parental involvement is not limited to academic achievement alone. In fact, parents who are engaged in their children's education also contribute to their social and emotional development. Goleman (2023) highlights that parental involvement nurtures emotional intelligence in children, which in turn enables students to manage stress, regulate their emotions, and engage more positively with academic challenges.

- **Setting High Expectations:** Another key factor is the setting of high expectations by parents. Liu & Zhang (2020) highlight that students who have parents with high academic expectations tend to perform better because they are motivated to meet those standards. However, these expectations must be balanced with support and understanding, as overly high or unrealistic expectations can lead to stress and anxiety, especially if students feel they cannot meet them. High expectations, when paired with encouragement and emotional support, create a motivating environment where students are challenged but not overwhelmed.

Ultimately, parental involvement significantly influences students' academic achievement by providing emotional, practical, and academic guidance. The combination of high expectations, support, and communication helps foster a sense of responsibility, intrinsic motivation, and confidence in students, all of which are essential for academic success.

Family support, in its various forms—emotional, financial, informational, and instrumental—plays a pivotal role in a student's academic and emotional development. Parents who provide consistent involvement, open communication, and set high but realistic expectations contribute to students' academic success. Parental involvement not only impacts academic achievement but also supports the development of essential life skills, such as emotional intelligence, resilience, and self-regulation. With strong family support, students are better equipped to manage academic stress, perform well in school, and develop into confident, capable individuals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, academic stress is a complex issue that affects many students, often influencing their mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. However, emotional intelligence provides students with the tools to manage stress effectively by regulating their emotional responses and using adaptive coping strategies. This paper emphasizes that emotionally intelligent students are better able to navigate academic challenges, stay focused, and maintain motivation, which leads to improved academic outcomes. Furthermore, family support plays an indispensable role in shaping students' emotional intelligence, providing them with the necessary resources to cope with academic stress. Parental involvement, through open communication, setting realistic expectations, and offering emotional and practical support, significantly enhances students' resilience to stress and contributes to their academic success. By nurturing emotional intelligence and providing

robust family support, students can better manage academic pressure, perform well in school, and develop essential life skills for future success.

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