

Exploring the Relationships between Social Competence, Academic Stress and Academic Performance among Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to explored the relationships of social competence, academic stress and academic performance among undergraduate students. A quantitative research approach was adopted using a survey research design. The population comprised undergraduate students from public and private general universities in Punjab. A total of 866 students were selected through a multistage sampling technique from nine universities. Data were collected using two adapted instruments: the Multidimensional Social Competence Scale and the Student Stress Inventory Scale. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, range) and correlation analysis. Findings revealed that students generally exhibited moderate levels of social competence and academic stress, while academic performance levels were relatively high. Social competence showed positively correlated with both academic stress and academic performance .Academic stress showed negatively correlated with academic performance. Based on these findings, it is recommended that universities implement structured social competence training programs and peer mentoring initiatives and provide academic counselling services to help students manage stress. These measures will foster a more supportive academic environment and enhance student success. This study offered a valuable insights for educator, policymakers, counselors, highlighted the need to enhance student social competences, reduce academic stress and improve overall academic performance.



Introduction

In today's world, university students encounter various challenges that significantly impact their overall well-being and academic success (Morales et al., 2020). These pressures have intensified academic stress, which adversely affects both mental health and academic performance (Deng, 2022). Academic stress is often triggered by excessive academic demands, time management difficulties, fear of failure, and the pressure to meet high expectations from peers, family, and educators (Kamila & Ramadhani, 2024). Prolonged exposure to academic stress can lead to burnout, reduced motivation, and impaired cognitive functioning, further hindering students' academic performance (Lee et al., 2023). As educational institutions aim to enhance student support systems, it is essential to understand the factors contributing to academic stress and their relation with academic performance (Abdullah, 2020). Among these factors, social competence plays a critical role in helping students cope with academic stress. Students with higher levels of social competence are better equipped to manage academic pressure by utilizing effective communication, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies (Biswas, 2024; Liu, 2021). This competence allows them to seek support, collaborate effectively in academic settings, and maintain focus during academic tasks, ultimately improving performance (Veziroglu, 2023; Jourabian Fakour Tabrizi et al., 2023). Therefore, social competence not only helps mitigate the effects of academic stress but also fosters academic performance. However, despite this understanding, limited research has specifically examined how social competence influences both academic stress and academic performance among undergraduate students, particularly in the context of higher education in Pakistan.

Objectives Of The Study

- I. To assess the level of social competence, academic stress, academic performance and interpersonal relationships among students at the university level.
- II. To investigate the relationships among social competence, academic stress and academic performance of undergraduate students.

Statement of The Problem

University students often experience substantial academic stress, which negatively affects their competencies and overall well-being. Social competence, including communication skills, social knowledge, emotional regulation, and social motivation, plays a vital role in managing academic stress (Yuhuan et al., 2022). While academic stress is known to impair student performance (Barbayannis et al., 2022), higher social competence helps reduce stress and improve academic outcomes (Andiani, 2023). This study examines the relationship among social competence on academic stress and academic performance among university students. Findings reveal that students demonstrate moderate social competence, indicating room for improvement. The results suggest the need for targeted interventions to enhance emotional regulation and social skills to reduce academic stress and improve performance. This study highlights the importance of developing social competence to support student well-being and academic success.

Literature Review

Social competence is a holistic concept that encompasses social, emotional, and cognitive abilities necessary for adjusting to different situations. It is a cornerstone of the education process, fostering an effective and high-quality learning environment (Veziroglu-Celik M, 2023). Social competence includes the capacity to assess social circumstances, maintain interpersonal connections, and adapt

to various social situations. It encompasses cognitive abilities, emotional and behavioural patterns, social awareness, and personal world values related to social interactions (Márquez et al., 2006). In educational psychology, social competence is a crucial topic, as students with social competence can make the most of society in terms of their conduct. In a globalized society, students need to develop competences in social, cultural, environmental, and technological dimensions. This is crucial due to political difficulties, societal divides, conflicts, and uneven regional development (Robertson, 2021). Higher education institutions must emphasize these competences to prepare students for the workforce. Despite challenges, some institutions are incorporating social competence development into their curricula to prepare students not only academically but also socially for the modern world. Higher education institutions are responsible for producing competent undergraduates for the labour market. To adapt to changing job markets and society, universities must equip students with socially competent skills. Education systems are dynamic, reflecting the evolving society they serve (Ahmed, 2020). It's essential to develop and hone "soft skills" even as educational methods change. Therefore, it's crucial to evaluate soft skills and social competence to prepare students for future success

Academic stress is the emotional and psychological strain students experience due to academic expectations, demands, and pressures. This stress can significantly impact their well-being and academic performance (Abdullah, 2020). It can also negatively affect social competence, raising anxiety. Social competence can help lessen academic stress by providing support in social networks. Students with higher social competence reported less everyday stress and improved coping mechanisms (Guillena, J. 2023). The complex relationship between academic stress and social competence highlights the importance of developing social competence to mitigate the negative impacts of academic stress.

Academic performance is a crucial measure of a person's knowledge, competencies, and skills acquired in a learning environment, often measured by the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). However, social competence is increasingly recognized as a significant factor in determining students' overall performance and well-being (Akbaribooreng et al., 2015). Three presumptions have been used to determine the relationship between social competence and academic achievement: a direct correlation, social competence enhancing students' social support, and the importance of effective social interaction in maximizing intellectual capacity (Zhang et al., 2021).

Methodology

The present study employed a quantitative approach using a survey research design to objectively examine the effect of social competence on academic stress and academic performance. Quantitative research utilizes predetermined instruments to generate statistical data, ensuring objectivity and allowing for robust analysis. Survey research, which gathers individuals' perspectives through numerical data, was used to collect information from a selected sample at a single point in time. To ensure representativeness, a multistage stratified random sampling technique was applied. First, Punjab was divided into three geographical regions: Southern, Central, and Northern Punjab. From a total of 69 general universities in Punjab, 13% (nine universities—six public and three private) were randomly selected, with equal representation from each region. In the second stage, two departments from sciences, social sciences, and arts and humanities were randomly chosen, considering faculty availability across the selected universities. Finally, in the third stage, 866 BS undergraduate students were conveniently selected from these departments based on their availability. This sampling approach allowed for geographical and disciplinary representation, providing a comprehensive dataset for analysis.

Data Analysis

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the relationships among social competence, academic stress and academic performance among undergraduate students. It begins with a summary of demographic characteristics, followed by the validation of constructs through analyses. Correlation explores relationships among key variables. The section concludes by discussing the findings in relation to the study's objectives and providing clear insights into the complex dynamics of these variables.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	394	45.5%
Female	472	54.5%
Age		
18-20	320	37.0%
21-23	400	46.2%
24 and above	146	16.8%
University sector		
Public	561	64.8%
Private	305	35.2%
Department		
Education	173	19.9%
Psychology	160	18.4%
English	154	17.7%
Computer science	143	16.5%
Chemistry	122	14.1%
Islamic studies	112	12.9%
Semester		
6th Semester	160	18.5%
7th Semester	67	7.7%
8th Semester	164	18.9%

Table 1 indicated that a total of 866 undergraduate students participated in the study. The sample comprised 45.5% male ($n = 394$) and 54.5% female ($n = 472$) students. The age distribution was as follows: 37.0% of the participants were between 18-20 years old, 46.2% were between 21-23 years old, and 16.8% were 24 years old and above. Regarding the university sector, 64.8% of the students were from public universities ($n = 561$), while 35.2% were from private universities ($n = 305$).

The participants were drawn from various departments, with 19.9 % from the Education department, 18.1 % from Psychology, 18.4 % from English, 17.7% from Computer Science, 16.5% from Chemistry, and 14.1% from Islamic Studies. In terms of semester distribution, 12.9 % were in the 6th semester, 7.7% were in the 7th semester, and 18.9% were in the 8th semester.

These demographic characteristics provide a diverse representation of the undergraduate student population, which is essential for exploring the relationships among social competence, academic stress and academic performance. The variety in age, gender, university sector, department, and semester ensure that the findings of this study are generalizable across different segments of the student population.

Descriptive Statistic

To measure the level of Social Competence, academic stress and academic performance Undergraduate Students the mean value of scale is divided into ‘Low’, Medium, and ‘High’ (Salikin, et.al, 2014). Mean values have been categorized into three levels (ranges) i.e., Low (1.00-2.33), Medium (2.34-3.66), and High (3.67-5.00).

Table 2: Level of Social Competence and its subsidiary indicators

Indicators	Mean	S.D	Level
1. Social motivation	3.28	0.69	Moderate
2. Social Inferencing	3.28	0.70	Moderate
3. Demonstrating empathic concern	3.60	1.95	Moderate
4. Social knowledge	3.44	0.79	Moderate
5. Verbal skills	3.17	0.98	Moderate
6. Nonverbal skills	3.09	0.79	Moderate
7. Emotional regulation	2.91	0.83	Moderate
Overall mean	3.40	0.96	Moderate

Tables 2 reflect the undergraduate student’s perception regarding their social competence. Data in the table shows that the level of university students in social competence was reported at moderate level of mean (3.40). The level for all its sub indicators (items) was also reported at the moderate level of mean.

Table 3: Level of Social motivation and its subsidiary indicators perceived by Undergraduate Students

Indicators	Mean	S.D	Level
1. I prefer to spend time alone	3.42	1.23	Moderate
2. I require motivation to communicate with or interact with others	3.29	1.28	Moderate
3. I show little interest in people	3.08	1.26	Moderate
4. I enjoy meeting new people	3.35	1.24	Moderate
5. I initiate friendly conversation with people	3.40	1.24	Moderate
6. I ask people questions about themselves or their lives	3.14	1.29	Moderate
Overall average percentage and mean scores	3.28	1.25	Moderate

Table 3 reveals the levels of undergraduate students regarding perceptions in social motivation and an indicator of social competence. Data in the table show that the level of undergraduate students in Social Inferencing was reported as moderate level of mean (3.28). The level of all its sub-indicators (items) was also reported at moderate level of mean.

Table 4: Level of “Social Inferencing” and its subsidiary indicators perceived by Undergraduate Students

Indicators	Mean	SD	Level
1. I understand when people are being	2.48	1.23	Moderate

arrogant			
2. I cannot judge who is trustworthy	3.10	1.26	Moderate
3. I can see things from another person's perspective	3.23	1.18	Moderate
4. I cannot predict what other people will do or how they will react	3.33	1.00	Moderate
5. I can understand when people are joking	3.72	1.24	High
Overall average percentage and mean score	3.22	1.18	Moderate

Table 4 reflects those levels undergraduate students regarding social Inferencing an indicator of social competence. Data in the table show that level of undergraduate students in social Inferencing was reported at moderate level of mean (3. 22). The level of all its sub- indicators (items) were also reported to have a moderate level of mean except one (I can understand when people are joking) which was at high mean. (3.72)

Table 5: Level of “Demonstrating Empathic Concern” and its subsidiary indicators perceived by Undergraduate Students

Indicators	Mean	S.D	Level
1. I am sensitive to the feeling and concerns of others	3.59	1.21	Moderate
2. I show concern for others when they are distressed	3.66	1.23	Moderate
3. I congratulate people when good things happen to them	3.29	1.39	Moderate
4. I try to cheer up people (when they are upset)	3.64	1.45	Moderate
5. I apologize after hurting someone	3.34	1.33	Moderate
6. I do not offer to help people (unless they are told to)	3.53	1.44	Moderate
Overall average percentage and mean score	3.50	1.34	Moderate

Table 5 reflects the levels undergraduate students regarding perceptions in Demonstrating Empathic Concern an indicator of social competence. The data in the table shows that the level of undergraduate students in Demonstrating Empathic Concern was reported as moderate level of mean (3.50). The level of all its sub- indicators (items) was also reported at moderate level.

Table 6: Level of “Social Knowledge” and its subsidiary indicators perceived by Undergraduate Students

Indicators	Mean	S.D	Level
1. I change my behavior according to the situation	3.49	1.19	Moderate
2. I dress appropriately of my age and social situation	3.35	1.23	Moderate
3. I hide my true feelings (when necessary) so that I don't come	3.37	1.34	Moderate

across as rude			
4. My expectations to friends are reasonable	3.07	1.28	Moderate
Overall average percentage and mean score	3.32	1.26	Moderate

Table 6 depicts the level of undergraduate students regarding perceptions in Social Knowledge as an indicator of social competence. Data in the table shows that the level of students in social knowledge was reported as moderate level of mean (3.32). The level of all its sub- indicators (items) was also reported at moderate level.

Table 7: Level of “Verbal Skills” and its subsidiary indicators perceived by Undergraduate Students

Indicators	Mean	S.D	Level
1. I can change conversations to my favorite topic or interest	3.25	1.62	Moderate
2. I give other people a chance to speak during conversations	3.18	1.25	Moderate
3. I have trouble joining conversations appropriately	3.24	1.25	Moderate
Overall average percentage and mean score	3.22	1.37	Moderate

Table 7 shows the level of undergraduate students regarding perceptions in Verbal Skills an indicator of social competence. Data in the table shows that the level of students in verbal skills was reported as moderate level of mean (3.22). The level of all its sub- indicators (items) was also reported at moderate level.

Table 8: Level of “Non-Verbal Skills” and its subsidiary indicators perceived by Undergraduate Students

Indicators	Mean	S. D	Level
1. I can read other people’s facial expression easily	2.92	1.30	Moderate
2. I look people in the eye when talking to them	3.32	1.20	Moderate
3. I use appropriate gestures when communicating with people	2.90	1.65	Moderate
4. I speak with a boring, dull tone of voice	3.09	1.29	Moderate
5. I smile appropriately in social situations	2.98	1.26	Moderate
Overall average percentage and mean score	3.04	1.34	Moderate

Table 8 illustrates the level of undergraduate students regarding perceptions in Non-Verbal Skills, an indicator of social competence. Data in the table shows that, as a whole, the level of students in non-verbal skills was reported as moderate level of mean (3.04). The level of all its sub- indicators (items) was also reported at moderate level.

Table 9: Level of “Emotional Regulation” and its subsidiary indicators perceived by Undergraduate Students

Indicators	Mean	S. D	Level
1. I get frustrated easily	2.98	1.31	Moderate
2. I am patient (e.g., when waiting)	3.06	1.31	Moderate
3. My emotional responses tend to be extreme	2.63	1.29	Moderate
4. I disagree with people without fighting or arguing	3.32	1.20	Moderate
5. I stay calm when problems	3.18	1.29	Moderate
Overall average percentage and mean score	3.03	1.28	Moderate

Table 9 illustrates the level of undergraduate students regarding perceptions in Emotional Regulation, an indicator of social competence. Data in the table shows that the level of students in emotional regulation was reported as moderate level of mean (3.03). The level of all its sub-indicators (items) was also reported at moderate level.

Table 10: Level of Academic Stress and its subsidiary indicators perceived by Undergraduate Students

Indicators	Mean	S. D	Level
1. I have a financial problem because of the expenses of the university.	2.55	1.08	Moderate
2. I find it difficult to balance time between study and social activity.	2.67	1.12	Moderate
3. Nervous during the class presentation.	2.48	1.09	Moderate
4. An excessive assignment during the exam makes me worry.	2.56	1.04	Moderate
5. I take pressure of exams too much.	2.67	1.09	Moderate
6. I feel the burden of academic workloads.	2.54	1.08	Moderate
7. I feel stressed from difficult subject.	2.70	1.05	Moderate
8. Difficult in handling my academic problem.	2.57	1.04	Moderate
9. I feel lack of mutual help among classmates.	2.58	1.07	Moderate
10. I face difficulty in adjusting with opposite gender.	2.52	1.16	Moderate
11. Teachers biased behavior irritates me irritated.	2.59	1.02	Moderate
12. I am unable to discuss academic failures with people around me.	2.57	1.05	Moderate
Overall average percentage and mean score	2.58	1.07	Moderate

Table 10 depicts the level of undergraduate students’ perception regarding their academic stress. Data in the table show that, as a whole, the level of students in academic stress was reported at

moderate level of mean (2.58). The level of all its sub-indicators (items) was also reported at a moderate level of mean.

Table 11: Level of Academic Performance perceived by Undergraduate Students

Indicator	Mean	SD	Level
Academic Performance	3.79	1.02	High

Table 11 illustrates the perceived level of AP among undergraduate students. The mean score is (3.79), which corresponds to a "High" level of academic performance. This indicates that, on average, students perceive their academic achievements and abilities positively.

Table 12: Correlation among Social Competence, Academic Stress and Academic Performance of Undergraduate Students

Variables		Academic stress	Academic performance
Social Competence	R	0.10	0.08
	Sig.	.002	.009
	N	866	866
Academic Stress	R		-.08
	Sig.		.015
	N		

The table 12 illustrated the relationship among social competence, academic stress and academic performance among undergraduate students. A Pearson correlation test was administered to check relationships among variables.

There was a weak positive relationship was found between social competence and academic stress ($R = 0.10$, $P = .002$), indicated that students with higher social competence might experience slightly more academic stress.

A significant weak relationship was found between social competence and academic performance ($R = 0.08$, $p = .009$), indicated that higher social competence is slightly associated with better academic performance.

A significant negative relationship was found between academic stress and academic performance ($R = -0.08$, $p = .015$), showed that students who experience higher academic stress tend to have slightly lower academic performance.

Discussions

This study examined the relationship of social competence, academic stress and performance among undergraduate students. To achieve this, respondents' perceptions were collected and analyzed. The findings indicate that undergraduate students have a moderate perception of social competence, consistent with previous research by Vestad (2022), which suggests that while social competence develops throughout the academic journey, students often experience fluctuations due to academic and environmental stressors. This may imply that the study's sample had limited exposure to experiences that foster social competence.

The present study found a weak but positive relationship between social competence and academic stress among undergraduate students, aligning with the findings of Magro et al., (2024) socially

competent students could take on more involvement in peer relationships, group projects, leadership roles, and other social and academic obligations, all of which might raise stress levels. According to their research, social media-active students typically face more academic responsibilities, which might result in elevated stress levels. Similarly, Nayak, & Kumar, (2018) have discovered that students who are more socially competent tend to be held to higher standards by their teachers and classmates, which might increase academic stress. Students that are socially adept could experience pressure to manage their interpersonal connections and academic success at the same time, which would raise their stress levels all around.

Similarly finding contradict with previous study conducted by Qayyum et al., (2022) According to this study, social competence significantly reduces academic stress among students attending public universities. Because of their improved interpersonal skills, emotional control, and problem-solving ability, students with higher social competence were better able to handle the stress and anxiety associated with academic and career worries (La Greca, 1987).

Other study conducted by Nayak, & Kumar (2018) social competence significantly reduces academic stress among In Bokaro Steel City, the study discovered that collaborative learning improved social competence, decreased academic stress, and had a favorable effect on students' academic performance. Because of their increased involvement, support for one another, and ability to solve problems together, students who took part in collaborative learning activities performed better academically. Furthermore, by encouraging a sense of belonging and shared accountability, the collaborative setting lessened academic stress while simultaneously advancing the growth of social competence via interpersonal interactions, teamwork, and communication (Qayyum et al., 2022).

Vestad Tharaldsen, (2022) found that increased social competence decreased academic stress. This disparity can result from contextual variations among student groups, indicating that the correlation between academic stress and social competence may change depending on the specific situation. According to Sharma, (2016) social competence is associated with increased emotional intelligence, which helps students deal more resiliently with the demands of school. According to their research, socially competent students may use their interpersonal abilities to balance their social and academic obligations, ask for academic assistance, and manage their time well, all of which can reduce stress levels.

The current study found that social competence weak significant relationship with academic performance of undergraduate students that align with the study conducted by Tabassum et al., (2024) found a strong positive relationship between social competence and academic performance among university students, indicating that students with higher social competence tend to have achieve better academic performance likely due to enhanced communication, relationship, and emotional regulation skills that support their academic engagement and achievement (Vafa et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Undergraduate students demonstrated a moderate level of overall social competence, including social motivation, inferencing, empathic concern, social knowledge, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and emotional regulation. Academic stress among students was reported at a moderate level, with factors such as financial problems, workload, exam pressure, and difficulty balancing time contributing to stress. Despite academic stress, students' academic performance was perceived to be at a high level, indicating confidence in managing coursework and achieving success. Social competence is positively correlated with both academic stress and academic

performance suggesting that socially competent students may experience slightly more stress but also perform slightly better academically. Academic stress is negatively correlated with academic performance indicating that higher stress is linked to slightly lower academic performance.

Recommendation

- Universities should incorporate social competence training in their curriculum, including activities that develop social motivation, Inferencing skills, emphatic concern and emotional regulation.
- Institution should offer academic counselling services to help students manage stress related to workload, exams and financial challenges.

Credit Authors Statement

Farheen Malik: writing original draft, conceptualization and methodology Zunaira Fatima Syeda: supervision, reviewing, editing and data curation, Uzma Shahzadi: Co-Supervision, reviewing and editing methodology.

Compliance With Ethical Standards

It is decaled that all authors don't have any conflict of interest. It is also declared that this article does not contain any studies with human participant and animals performed by any of the authors. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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