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## Emotional Intelligence and Academic Adjustment Among Kuwaiti University Students

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in academic adjustment among university students in Kuwait. Using a stratified random sample of 400 undergraduate students (200 males, 200 females) from various academic years and majors, the research employed validated self-report measures to assess EI and academic adjustment. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment ( $r = 0.62, p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that students with higher EI are better equipped to handle academic challenges. Gender differences were found in EI (favoring females), but not in academic adjustment. Emotional intelligence increased significantly across academic years, while no significant differences were observed between scientific and literary majors. These findings highlight the importance of EI in facilitating students' adaptation to university life. The study recommends implementing EI-based support programs to enhance students' academic and personal development.*

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence(EI), Academic Adjustment, Kuwaiti, University

### Introduction

The transition to university represents a critical developmental stage in a student's life, often accompanied by numerous academic, social, and emotional challenges. University students are expected to adapt to new academic demands, increased personal responsibility, and diverse social environments. The ability to navigate these challenges effectively is known as *academic and social adjustment*, which plays a pivotal role in students' academic success, psychological well-being, and overall university experience Mulaudzi, I. C. (2023).

In recent years, *emotional intelligence (EI)* has emerged as a key psychological construct linked to students' capacity to cope with academic and social pressures. Defined as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and manage emotions in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), emotional intelligence is considered essential for managing stress, maintaining motivation, and establishing supportive interpersonal relationships. Research has increasingly shown that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to display better academic performance, higher engagement, and more effective adjustment to university life (Parker et al., 2004; Goleman, 1995).

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In the context of Kuwait, where rapid social and educational changes are influencing university environments, understanding how emotional intelligence contributes to academic adjustment is particularly relevant. Kuwaiti university students often face additional pressures related to cultural expectations, career uncertainty, and evolving educational systems. Investigating the relationship between EI and academic adjustment in this population can provide valuable insights for educators, counselors, and policymakers.

This study aims to examine the role of emotional intelligence in academic adjustment among university students in Kuwait. Specifically, it explores the extent to which EI predicts students' ability to adapt to academic demands, and whether gender, academic year, and field of study influence this relationship. By addressing these questions, the research seeks to inform intervention strategies that support student development and academic persistence.

### **Academic and Social Adjustment**

Academic and social adjustment are two of the most prominent concepts in educational psychology and counseling. They constitute essential factors in the academic success and psychological and behavioral stability of university students during their higher education journey.

Academic Adjustment refers to a student's ability to adapt to the demands of university life, including academic performance, time management, coping with academic pressures, and engaging effectively with the educational environment. According to Baker and Siryk (1984), academic adjustment comprises four major components: academic motivation, which reflects the desire to learn and succeed; academic performance, which pertains to achievement levels and task completion ability; satisfaction with the educational environment, reflecting acceptance and harmony with the university system; and the ability to manage academic stress by organizing effort and overcoming challenges. Manifestations of healthy academic adjustment include success in exams, consistent attendance and classroom participation, effective time management, and proactively seeking academic support when needed.

Social Adjustment, on the other hand, is a student's ability to build and maintain healthy social relationships both on and off campus. It involves positive interaction with peers and faculty members and active engagement in university life. Key components include social skills such as communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution; social integration, reflected in a sense of belonging and participation in student activities; emotional stability, or psychological balance in social contexts; and psychological flexibility, which is the ability to adapt to cultural and social diversity within the university setting. Observable signs of good social adjustment include forming new friendships, participating in extracurricular activities, feeling connected to the campus community, and successfully interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

The importance of both academic and social adjustment cannot be overstated. These factors positively influence students' mental health, support their academic persistence and success, reduce the likelihood of academic failure or dropout, and contribute significantly to personality development and independence.

Importantly, many studies have highlighted the close relationship between emotional intelligence and both academic and social adjustment. Emotional intelligence enhances a student's ability to manage stress, maintain self-awareness, and understand others' emotions, all of which are crucial for navigating academic and social environments effectively (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman,

**Emotional intelligence (EQ)** is the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and express emotions effectively in oneself and others. It is an important psychological concept that emerged in the 1990s and has been linked to personal and professional success, academic adjustment, and social adjustment.

### **Definitions:**

Salovey & Mayer (1990) defined EQ as "the ability to accurately perceive emotions, utilize them to facilitate thinking, understand emotional meanings, and regulate emotions to promote personal growth."

Daniel Goleman (1995) expanded the concept to include emotional and social competencies such as self-control, motivation, empathy, and interpersonal skills.

Boyatzis, et al. (2000).

### **Dimensions of EQ (according to Goleman):**

- **Self-awareness:** An individual's awareness of their emotions, strengths, and weaknesses.
- **Self-management:** The ability to control negative emotions and impulses.
- **Motivation:** The ability to direct oneself toward goals and motivate oneself.
- **Empathy:** Understanding and responding to the emotions of others.
- **Social Skills:** The ability to build successful relationships and communicate effectively.

### **Emotional Intelligence Measurement Tools:**

- SSEIT (Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test)
- EQ-i (Emotional Quotient Inventory)
- MSCEIT (Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test)
- Importance of Emotional Intelligence:
  - Contributes to academic adjustment and success.
  - Improves social relationships and reduces conflict.
  - Supports mental health and reduces stress and anxiety.
  - Important for success in leadership and teamwork.

Kriesberg, L. (2018).

### **Practical Applications:**

- **In education:** Developing programs to develop emotional intelligence in students to improve performance and adaptability.
- **In the workplace:** Use in employee and leadership assessments.
- **In psychotherapy:** Helping individuals understand and manage their emotions.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 400 full-time undergraduate students (200 males, 200 females) from Kuwait University participated. Stratified random sampling ensured equal representation across academic years (25% from each year) and academic disciplines (55% scientific, 45% literary). Participants were aged 18–24 years ( $M = 20.7$ ,  $SD = 1.5$ ) and in good academic standing.

### Instruments

- **Emotional Intelligence:** Assessed using the 33-item Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT; Schutte et al., 1998), validated for Arabic speakers (Alkozei et al., 2019). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Internal consistency was high ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ).
- **Academic Adjustment:** Measured by the 24-item Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1984), including academic motivation, performance, and institutional attachment. The Arabic version showed good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ).

**Procedure:** Following ethical approval, participants completed an online survey after providing informed consent. Data collection spanned four weeks with reminders issued to maximize response. Responses were anonymized and stored securely.

**Data Analysis:** SPSS v.27 was used for analysis. Descriptive statistics summarized the data; Pearson's  $r$  assessed the relationship between EI and academic adjustment. Independent  $t$ -tests compared gender groups, and one-way ANOVA examined differences by academic year and discipline, with post-hoc Tukey tests as needed ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Ethical Considerations:** Participation was voluntary and confidential. No personal identifiers were collected. Results were shared in aggregate with the university for policy development.

## Results

This study investigated the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Academic Adjustment (AA) among university students in Kuwait, with attention to demographic variables such as gender, academic year, and major.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<b>Emotional Intelligence (EI)</b>	3.85	0.61	2.10	5.00
<b>Academic Adjustment (AA)</b>	3.47	0.72	1.80	4.90

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for key variables**

The mean scores indicate a moderately high level of emotional intelligence and academic adjustment among university students. The variation in scores suggests individual differences in the students' emotional and academic capacities.

Variable 1	Variable 2	Pearson's r	p-value
Emotional Intelligence	Academic Adjustment	0.62	< 0.01

**Table 2. Correlation analysis between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment**

**Interpretation:** There is a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment. This implies that students with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to demonstrate better academic adjustment. The result supports theoretical assumptions that emotional self-regulation and interpersonal awareness contribute directly to navigating academic challenges.

VARIABLE	GENDER	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	T-VALUE	P-VALUE
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE	Male	3.65	0.58	3.21	< 0.01
	Female	4.05	0.63		
ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT	Male	3.43	0.70	0.89	0.37
	Female	3.51	0.74		

**Table 3. Gender Differences (Independent Samples T-Test)**

A statistically significant difference in emotional intelligence exists in favor of females, suggesting that female students tend to possess higher emotional awareness and regulation skills. However, no significant gender differences were observed in academic adjustment, indicating that both male and female students adjust similarly to academic environments despite differences in emotional processing.

Academic Year	EI Mean	Std. Deviation
First Year	3.55	0.59
Second Year	3.70	0.61
Third Year	3.88	0.63
Fourth Year	4.10	0.65
F-value = 4.76, p-value < 0.01		

**Table 4. Differences by Academic Year (One-Way ANOVA)**

The results reveal statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence across academic years. Emotional intelligence tends to improve progressively, reaching its peak in the fourth year. This may be attributed to accumulated life experiences, emotional maturity, and increased exposure to academic and social challenges.

Major	EI Mean	Std. Deviation	AA Mean	Std. Deviation
Scientific	3.92	0.60	3.55	0.70
Literary	3.78	0.62	3.40	0.74
F-values: EI = 2.15 (p = 0.12), AA = 1.98 (p = 0.15)				

**Table 5. Differences by Academic Major (One-Way ANOVA)**

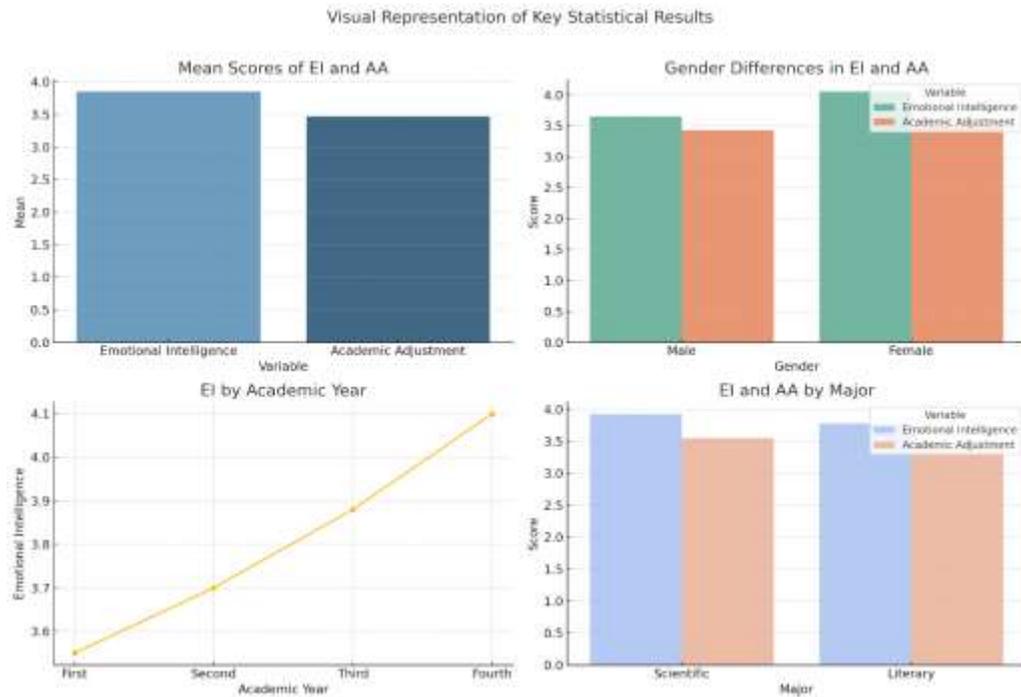
No statistically significant differences were found between students from scientific and literary disciplines in either emotional intelligence or academic adjustment. This suggests that emotional traits and adjustment capacities may be more influenced by personal attributes and socio-emotional environments rather than field of study.

VARIABLE	CATEGORY	FREQUENCY (N=400)	PERCENTAGE
<b>GENDER</b>	Male	200	50%
	Female	200	50%
<b>ACADEMIC YEAR</b>	First Year	100	25%
	Second Year	100	25%
	Third Year	100	25%
	Fourth Year	100	25%
<b>ACADEMIC MAJOR</b>	Scientific	220	55%
	Literary	180	45%

**Table 6. Demographic Breakdown of the Sample**

Independent samples t-tests indicated significant gender differences in Emotional Intelligence ( $t = 3.21, p < 0.01$ ), with female students scoring higher ( $M = 4.05, SD = 0.63$ ) than male students ( $M = 3.65, SD = 0.58$ ), as illustrated in **Table 1**. However, no statistically significant difference was found in Academic Adjustment between genders ( $t = 0.89, p = 0.37$ ).

**Figure 1: Non-significant Differences in Emotional Intelligence and Academic Adjustment across Scientific and Literary Majors**



## Discussion

The present study deepens our understanding of how emotional intelligence (EI) influences academic adjustment among university students in Kuwait. Consistent with extant literature, our findings confirm that EI is a pivotal resource enabling students to navigate the complex social and academic demands of higher education (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). Specifically, the strong positive correlation between EI and academic adjustment ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) corroborates prior work demonstrating that students with greater emotional awareness and regulation report better coping strategies, higher persistence, and more effective study habits (Parker et al., 2004; Schutte et al., 2001).

### Gender and EI

The observed gender differences—wherein female students scored significantly higher in EI than males ( $p < 0.01$ )—align with meta-analytic evidence suggesting modest but reliable female advantages in emotional perception and empathy (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016; Joseph & Newman, 2010). However, the lack of gender differences in academic adjustment mirrors findings by Petrides and Furnham (2001), indicating that while females may excel in emotional competencies, male and female students leverage different but equally effective coping resources to adapt academically.

### Developmental Trends Across Academic Years

The progressive increase in EI from first- to fourth-year students enriches the developmental

perspective on EI, suggesting that prolonged engagement in a university environment fosters emotional growth (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). University experiences—such as collaborative projects, leadership roles in student organizations, and sustained peer interactions—likely enhance self-awareness and interpersonal skills over time (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2001).

### **Academic Major and Universality of EI**

Our finding of no significant EI or academic adjustment differences between scientific and literary majors challenges assumptions that discipline-specific stressors shape emotional coping. This supports the conceptualization of EI as a multidimensional trait relatively independent of academic content (Bar-On, 2006). It also underscores the role of contextual and personality factors—such as social support networks, teaching styles, and individual resilience—in shaping students' adjustment outcomes (Parker, Saklofske, & Stough, 2009).

### **Moderate Overall Levels and Practical Implications**

Although mean EI and academic adjustment scores were moderate, they suggest substantial room for growth. Given the robust association between EI and academic success, universities should consider integrating EI development into their curricula. Interventions such as workshops on emotional regulation, peer mentoring programs, and resilience training have been shown to boost both EI and academic outcomes (Nelis et al., 2009; Qualter et al., 2012). Establishing campus-based counseling centers that offer EI-focused group sessions could further scaffold students' socio-emotional skills.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study's cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences, and reliance on self-report measures raises concerns about social desirability bias (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011). Future research might employ longitudinal or experimental designs to test whether EI training causally enhances academic adjustment. Additionally, exploring moderator variables—such as personality traits (e.g., conscientiousness), cultural values, or perceived social support—would clarify under which conditions EI most strongly predicts adjustment (Pekaar et al., 2018). Finally, qualitative investigations could illuminate the specific EI competencies students deploy when managing academic stressors.

### **Conclusions**

The study reveals a strong link between emotional intelligence and students' academic adjustment, particularly in stress management and relationship formation. Female students showed higher emotional intelligence, possibly due to socialization. Emotional intelligence improves with academic progression, suggesting it transcends academic categorization and is better explained by personality and life context. Targeted educational and counseling initiatives can equip students for academic challenges, promoting well-being, persistence, and long-term success.

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