

The Relationship between Teachers' Emotional Intelligence, Job Stress on Job Performance in Higher Education Institutions in the United Arab Emirates During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract – Teachers' emotional intelligence has been impacted by fast changes in educational systems around the world because of COVID-19 that affected teachers' performance. This paper aims to look at the relationship between EI and job stress on teachers' job performance. Out of 250, 181 questionnaires were collected back with a return rate of 72.4 percent from various institutes in Sharjah and Ajman UAE. AMOS version 28 was used. The model was tested using a two-stage SEM methodology; first, the measurement model was used to assess the validity and reliability of the instrument, and then the structural model was estimated. The results revealed that there was a significant positive association between EI & job performance, the relationship of stress was found to be negative and significantly linked to EI during COVID-19. The results further show a positive but insignificant relationship between stress and job performance. As this study was restricted to Sharjah and Ajman UAE, therefore it cannot be generalized.

Keywords – EI, job stress, job performance, teachers, COVID-19, UAE.

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1. Introduction

In UAE, a substantial number of teachers have lost their jobs. Since the beginning of the crisis, the pandemic has hurt teachers' mental health and caused them a high degree of stress. According to recent studies, teachers' EI was harmed during COVID-19, as they were under stress to give online classes [6]. As a result of the increased burden of stress, poor EI is often associated with it. UAE's government announced in March 2020 that schools, colleges, and institutions will be closed [2]. The pandemic has been jeopardizing the workings of almost every organization, and educational institution, and education has been hit hard throughout the world. The closure of universities and pressed incomes have negatively impacted teachers' EI, resulting in low salaries and job risk. Since such a pandemic has never occurred in UAE, there is little literature available except a few articles published in UAE local newspapers. The institutes are the places that bring thousands of people into contact, hence making them vulnerable to viruses. Institutions had no choice but to start offering online classes to avoid losing students, which caused some challenges for both teachers and students [1]. On the other hand, institutes were obliged to decrease their workforces due to intense economic pressures at the time, and as a result, many people lost their employment. Hopman (2020) stated that teachers bear the brunt of the consequences, in terms of lost jobs as well as spending time learning new skills. The current study explores the "impact of EI and stress on teachers' job performance in UAE higher educational institutes during the COVID-19 pandemic". More specifically, the paper will examine the relationship between a teacher's EI, stress and job performance, and to what extent the performance of the teachers has been impacted by stress and emotional intelligence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To our understanding, this is the initial research that examines the impact of EI and stress on teacher job performance in UAE higher educational establishments during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research focuses on teachers' EI, which is extremely important during the teaching process. This relationship has not been examined in the UAE setting in the extant literature. The researcher collected data from university teachers for this study. Specifically, it will provide knowledge regarding the impact of stress and EI on university teachers' performance.

2. Literature Review

The ability to perceive, express, interpret, motivate, influence, and manage emotions is known as EI [3]. Pérez (2003) shows that individuals who are lacking EI have difficulty managing their emotions, lack empathy, and are unable to operate at a higher level. As a result, someone with a high EI may better communicate, reduce tension, improve relationships, resolve conflicts, and sympathize with others. The level of stress teachers face in their work is a source of concern. The effects of stress extend beyond the teacher to the students, as well as the learning environment, as stated by Cooper and Travers (1996). EI contributes to better psychological health, while people with poor EI are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety disorders. Teachers who are more emotionally savvy are better able to manage their emotions and sympathize with others around them [19], [31]. Campbell's guide "Modeling the Performance Prediction Problem in Industrial and Organizational Psychology" was the first academic study to look at the link between employee performance and conduct. Since then, job performance research has progressed, and it has gained greater momentum in organizational and management studies. Based on the work of Campbell (1990), job performance can be defined as a collection of factors that come together to produce an employee's total contribution and achievement on the job [29].

2.1 Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance

Employees with high EI perform better on the job than those who are having low EI [8]. Employees can improve their emotional intelligence by developing their level of thinking to enhance job performance. Emotional intelligent employees will help others to manage their emotions effectively and perform better. Employees' perspectives on certain workplace behaviors, customs, and articulations vary [3]. There is evidence that there is a connection between emotional intelligence and job performance [4], [14].

H1: Emotional intelligence has a significant relationship with job performance

2.2 Emotional Intelligence and Job Stress

Social distancing and working from home are two outcomes of the epidemic that have resulted in modifications in the workplace [27], [35]. Employees' mental well-being is harmed by isolation at home, and they become more reliant on the usage of phones and laptops [22]. Furthermore, excessive usage of phones and laptops has been linked to a rise in eye problems, fatigue, headaches, and anxiety among employees, indicating that their mental and physical well-being has been affected due to pandemics [22]. The COVID-19 crisis has triggered educators to suffer from anxiety, stress, and depression, all of which affected their capability to teach well. A person who lacks EI would struggle to function well. Almost every study found a link between EI and stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as how it affects people's performance [7]. When a person's EI improves, so does his ability to cope with stress. According to Zhou & Yao (2020) study conducted in China, 9.1% of teachers have stress symptoms, and it is vital to provide psychological support to them. Furthermore, a teacher's behavior not only affects their performance but also affects the students' emotional well-being. Therefore, it is important to protect teachers' emotional intelligence [12].

H2: Emotional intelligence has a significant relationship with job stress.

2.3 Job Performance and Job Stress

Selye created the term "stress" in the 1930s, and defined stress as a state of stimulation in the body that causes alterations that disrupt normal physiologic functions [13]. Although early beliefs acknowledged that a high degree of stress can lead to several detrimental effects on the body over time, these physical reactions were thought to be crucial in allowing humans to adapt and survive in tough situations [15]. Stress among teachers is linked to absenteeism, turnover, and early retirement, all of which have a detrimental impact on the institute's climate and result in poor academic and behavioral outcomes for the students. Stressful life events including pandemics can have a significant negative effect on one's emotional health and mental well-being. Low performance can manifest itself in a variety of ways, including stress, mental health, anxiety & depression [36]. Similarly, uncertainty caused by COVID-19 has led to increased stress, sadness, and anxiety, affecting employee performance and productivity [5].

It should be added to this new context that teaching has been a stressful profession due to issues of interpersonal communication, high workloads, job instability, and insufficient training. According to research undertaken in several countries, many teachers have suffered from stress, anxiety, and depression [28]. Teachers' health could be impacted because of stress, leading to increase in absenteeism, and poor performance [15]. Furthermore, past research has discovered that working from home while utilizing information and communication technology can lead to emotions of stress, worry, and a decline in work satisfaction and performance [6].

H3: Job performance has a significant relationship with job stress.

2.4 Emotional Intelligence, Job Stress, and Job Performance

Due to high competition every business is always trying to survive and thrive, and this demands high-performing workers. However, it is difficult for businesses to maintain continuity in their operations when external events are unknown and threaten employees' well-being. The pandemic not only takes employees' attention away from their work but also jeopardizes their survival at work by causing physical and health issues [13]. The influence of COVID-19 on the mental health of professionals was studied by Weibelzahl et al., (2021). COVID-19 has caused not only a significant level of worry between employees, but also a decline in work satisfaction and performance [34]. COVID-19 pandemic has also influenced the employees' physical and emotional health, which further affects job performance. Hamid (2020) stated that during the pandemic, employees became progressively anxious about wellbeing, the possibility of becoming contaminated with the virus, societal marginalization, financial cost, and job instability. In this regard, it should be noted that COVID-19's effects were the primary cause of employee stress and poor work performance. A previous study has shown that pandemics, such as the COVID-19, have effect on the worker's performing both physically and emotionally [23]. Work-related stress factors, including job instability and the risk of unemployment, are related directly to an unusually poor performance during the pandemic [16].

3. Methodology

3.1 Measurements

The nature of EI was measured using the 11 items created by Wong and Law (2002).

The responses were measured on a Likert scale, with five being strongly agreed and one strongly disagreeing. The 4 items of job performance were self-developed and were graded on a five-point Likert scale, with five being strongly agreed and one strongly disagreeing. The 5 items of job stress were self-developed, with responses on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = No stress, 1 = Severe Stress). In addition, all participants had to fill out a section with demographic information.

3.2 Participants and Instruments

This research was conducted in Sharjah and Ajman UAE. It uses a quantitative research strategy that emphasizes measurement in data collection and analysis. Primary data was collected using a survey design method, while secondary data was gathered through academic journals, textbooks, and other forms of publishing. A total of 250 questionnaires were circulated to teachers in higher educational institutes. Out of 250, 181 questionnaires were collected back with a return rate of 72.4 percent. Respondents were guaranteed complete privacy and were asked to participate voluntarily. The participants included in this study were 181 teachers from different institutes in UAE, out of which there were 92 males (50.8%) and 89 females (49.2%), varying in age from 21 to 50 years. The normal age of respondents was 31- 40 years (44.8%), and the average income of participants was above 55,000 (35.9%). 118 (65.2) were married, and 53 (29.3%) were unmarried; 26 (14.4%) had a Bachelor's degree, 91 (50.3%) had a Master's degree; 16 (8.8%) had an MPhil, and 48 (26.5%) had a Ph.D. The range of teaching experience included 34 (18.8%) with 1–5 years, 82 (45.3%) with 6–10 years, 57 (31.5%) with 11–15 years, and 8 (4.4%) with more than 15 years.

3.3 Measurements

The measurement and structural equation models was performed by using AMOS version 28. The gathered data was further explored using Structural Equation Modelling. The model was tested using a two-stage SEM methodology; first, the measurement model was used to assess the validity and reliability of the instrument, and then the structural model was estimated [31]. Before applying the structural model, the measurement model was applied to all of the study's constructs, the study determined whether an item's loading was larger than or equal to 0.5. Its internal consistency by checking that its composite reliability scores were above 0.7, and its convergent validity by verifying that its average extracted variance was greater than or equal to 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010).

3.4 Normality Table

The skewness-kurtosis method was employed to determine whether all the variables were normal by using SPSS 28 [17]. They were all determined to be within their respective ranges. All skewness values are below their cut-off point of "3," and all kurtosis values fall under the "8" cutoff [9], [30] as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Assessment of Normality

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness
1S	2.3481	1.10321	.429	.785
2S	2.2652	1.11871	.519	.921
3S	2.4751	1.0779	.119	-1.25
4S	2.9337	1.66534	.208	-1.649
5S	2.4475	1.23097	.556	-0.67
1JP	3.4088	1.2287	.423	.841
2JP	3.5138	1.17193	.526	-.65
3JP	3.4641	1.16193	.524	-.62
4JP	3.6298	1.09595	.656	-.279
1E	3.4641	1.15714	.173	-1.165
2E	3.8066	0.9552	.338	-.833
3E	3.674	1.09992	-.413	-.866
4E	3.2431	1.18158	.069	-1.292
5E	3.6022	1.14833	.599	-.608
6E	3.7182	1.07142	-.485	-.794
7E	3.6409	1.19177	-.568	-.761
8E	3.6851	1.10315	-.78	-.157
9E	3.8729	1.0543	.663	.739
10E	3.6188	1.30106	-.486	-1.2
11E	3.8729	0.91311	.453	.579

3.5 Measurement Model

To first investigate the measurement model fit and then assess the measurement model's validity, a CFA was performed using the AMOS program 28. The analysis demonstrates that this model satisfactorily satisfies the matching requirements. The indication loadings were used to evaluate the indicator reliability.

Although 0.70 and higher indicator loadings are advised [17], indicators with loadings of less than 0.4 were removed from their respective constructs under this criterion. Figure 1 depicts the final model with the indicators used in the structural analysis and their corresponding loadings.

3.5.1 Model Fitness

To assess the model fitness, the following fit indices have been tested: CMIN/DF, AGFI, GFI, NFI, CFI, RMR, and RMSEA [17]. Further purifications and reassessments were made to guarantee that the model and the data were well-matched because some of these indices failed to meet their threshold values [9], [31]. The basic principles of a refinement process include a review of standardized regression weights (factor loadings), modification indices, and a standardized covariance matrix to enhance the model's fitness [9], [17]. Based on the standardized regression weights, some indicators from the initial measurement model were removed to enhance the model's fitness. There was a total of 8 items from the EI scale, 3 items from job stress, and 3 items from the job performance scale after lower loading items were eliminated.

The modification indices for the initial measurement model and the final measurement model are shown in Table 2. The model's fit indices were all within the required range, except the chi-square, which was significant ($X^2 = 133.940$, $df=71$, $p=.000$).

Table 2 Results of the Measurement Model

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Initial Measurement Model	Modified Measurement Model
CMIN / DF	Less than 5	5.110	1.886
The goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	> 0.90	.698	.909
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	> 0.80	.620	.866
Tucker and Lewis Index (TLI)	> 0.90	.676	.949
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> 0.90)	.715	.960
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	> 0.90	.671	.919
Root Mean Square Residuals	< 0.08	.08	.05
RMSEA	< 0.08	.151	.070

3.5.2 Construct Reliability and Validity

According to Hair et al. (2010), Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted can be used to evaluate reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (AVE). According to Table 3, all of the constructs have Cronbach's alpha values greater than the threshold of 0.70 [9] and their CR values are all within 0.70 [17]. The AVE have to be greater than 0.50 to be valid for convergent reasoning [17], [30]. Table 3 shows; the constructs' reliability and convergent validity of emotional intelligence, job stress, and job performance.

Table 3 Constructs Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	AVE	CR	CA
Emotional Intelligence	0.581	0.917	.928
Job Stress	0.610	0.818	.828
Job Performance	0.614	0.822	.810

Table 4 Discriminant Validity

	Emotional Intelligence	Job Stress	Job Performance
EI	0.762		
JS	-0.245	0.781	
JP	0.383	-0.04	0.784

Note: Factor Correlation Matrix with squared roots of AVE on the diagonal

Table 4 ensures that the model reaches the required level of discriminant validity, and the r between the two constructs can be calculated to reach an equivalent degree of discriminant validity, $r \leq 0.90$ [17]. The values are greater than their correlation with other constructs; the square roots of EI = 0.762, JS = 0.781, and JP = 0.784. Overall, the discriminant validity between the constructs can be accepted for this model.

3.6 Structural Model

Structural model outcomes were found to be quite like the modified measurement model indicating the good fit model; based on the same criteria used to evaluate the goodness-of-fit for the proposed model. Even though the chi-square was significant ($X^2 = 133.940$, $df = 71$, $P = 0.000$), the other fit indices were noticed to be within their threshold values as follows: $X^2 / df = 1.886$, $GFI = 0.909$, $AGFI = 0.866$, $CFI = 0.960$, $NFI = 0.919$, $RMR = 0.05$ and $RMSEA = 0.070$.

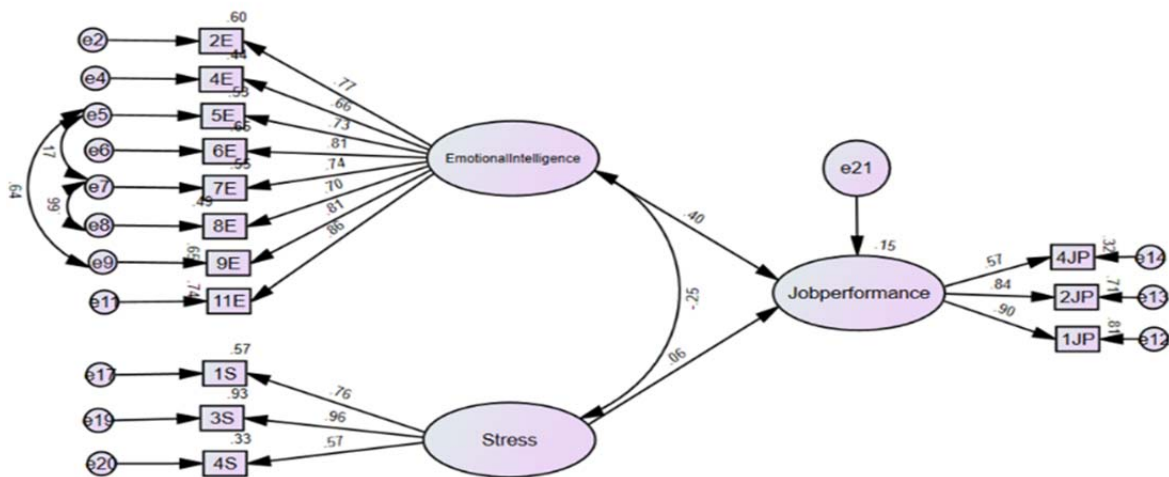


Figure 1 Structural Model

Source: Computed through AMOS version 28 and results are reported

4. Results

The study assessed the impact of EI and JS on job performance (Table 5 and Figure 2). There is a significant association among EI and job performance ($b = 0.389$, $t = 4.630$, $p < 0.05$).

Hypothesis H1 is accepted as the t-value is greater than 1.96 and the p-values less than 0.05. The connection among job stress and job performance is not significant ($b = 0.058$, $t = 0.725$, $p = 0.469$), given that the p-value is more than 0.05 and the t-value is less than 1.96. H2 was therefore not supported.

The relationship between EI on stress was negative and significant ($b = -0.151$, $t = -2.810$, $p < 0.05$), hence hypothesis H3 is accepted.

The squared multiple correlations (R^2) values and the impact for endogenous latent variables can be calculated as 0.26 (high effect), 0.13 (moderate effect), and 0.02 (low/ poor effect). The R^2 value for job performance was 0.15, indicating that job stress and emotional intelligence together account for 15% of the variance in job performance. The model of this investigation demonstrated the model-data fit and has an effect ranging from medium to high because the R^2 values for job performance were greater than 0.13 but less than 0.26.

Table 5 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis Relationship	Standardized Estimates	t-value	p-value	Decisions
Job Performance <--- EI	0.398	4.630	***	Accepted
Job Performance <--- JS	0.058	0.725	0.469	Rejected
Stress <---> EI	-0.151	-2.810	0.005	Accepted

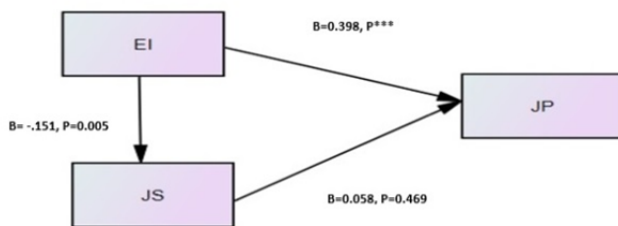


Figure 2 Structural Model

Source: Computed through AMOS version 26 and results are reported

5. Discussion

According to the study's findings, there is a positive correlation between EI, work performance and the results supported the alternative hypothesis. It has been found that employees with higher EI are more able to handle the events that happen at work and, as a result, experience higher levels of job satisfaction than those who are unable to do so [10]. Furthermore, it was noted that emotional intelligence is important in the educational sector, where there is a high level of interaction between instructors, staff, and pupils. Emotionally knowledgeable teachers were more likely to understand their behavioral and psychological needs and motivate their students during the COVID-19. They can also be more alert to disruptive behaviors, academic achievement, and relationship management in their students.

This conclusion is constant with the study findings of [25] discovered a link between EI and job performance; employees with a higher EI are more pleased with their professions and perform better. Employees having a high EI outperform those who have a normal EI score [8]. EI and job performance have a positive relationship [14]. Employees have to be able to recognize and control their own and others' emotions to enable employee interaction, which is critical for greater job performance [11]. The results indicate a positive correlation between job stress and teacher performance, rejecting the second hypothesis that stress at work is detrimental to performance. The findings show that there is no significant link among teachers' job stress and performance during COVID-19. Few findings have been performed to investigate the positive connection among work stress and performance. Researchers have identified four different types of relationships between stress and performance, including curvilinear, negative, positive, and no link at all [32]. A study by Salami (2010) indicates that stress helps motivate workers, which leads to improved job performance, demonstrating a beneficial link between stress and job performance. A study was undertaken at Tehran University to look at how stress affects productivity. Most employees claim that they experience constructive stress at work, which enhances performance. [20] Researcher has argued that job stress and performance are positively correlated. [34]. During the pandemic, teachers were inspired to perform well as many had a fear of losing their jobs and securing their jobs, they positively took the stress and were more concerned to perform well and take more responsibilities to show their skills and capabilities. Depending on its intensity, stress can either improve or impair work performance. Lack of stress limits the challenges that can be faced on the job, and performance suffers. Since stress makes it easier for a person to gather and apply resources to meet job needs, job performance generally tends to improve as stress levels rise gradually [26]. According to Hamlett (2019) one benefit of stress is that it can boost adrenaline and encourage someone to work more rapidly because of approaching deadlines. An incentive to complete the task might be found in stress. Eustress is what is known as this positive stress, and some individuals appreciate it. Everyone needs some amount of stress to be content, inspired, engaged, and productive throughout life [24]. Stress can also result in improved performance by increasing the tasks and responsibilities that will motivate workers to perform better at work. Through demands or conditions that involve the possibility of gains or progress, they push them beyond their comfort zones and encourage them to perform to their highest capacity or learn something new [21].

Other factors such as lack of role clarity, poor leadership, and inadequate resources can be linked with stress to test the relationship between stress on job performance [10]. In the last hypothesis, the association between EI and job stress among teachers in educational institutes of UAE during COVID-19 results showed that there was a significant inverse connection between EI and job stress. As a result, teachers with higher EI can better handle stressful events and situations. These conclusions have also been corroborated by the findings of several other findings including [18], [31], [33]. All the studies investigated found a link between EI and job stress. This is because if employees can comprehend and recognize their feelings using EI ideas, they will be able to make better decisions in their job and personal lives. One's ability to make wise decisions, preserve cooperative relationships, effectively handle stress, and adapt to change are all enhanced by having a high degree of EI.

6. Conclusion

COVID-19 virus-induced pandemic abruptly changed every area of daily life and created a significant amount of societal upheaval. The study provided evidence of the connection between teachers' emotional intelligence and job stress on job performance in higher education institutions in the UAE during the pandemic for the first time to the best of our knowledge. It has been found that employees with higher EI are more able to handle the events that happen at work and, as a result, experience higher levels of job satisfaction than those who are unable to do so. Furthermore, it was noted that emotional intelligence is important in the educational sector, where there is a high level of interaction between instructors, staff, and pupils. Emotionally knowledgeable teachers were more likely to understand their behavioural and psychological needs and motivate their students during the COVID-19. They can also be more alert to disruptive behaviours, academic achievement, and relationship management in their students. Teachers have to be able to recognize and control their own and others emotions to enable employee interaction, which is critical for greater job performance. During the pandemic, teachers were inspired to perform well as many had a fear of losing their jobs and securing their jobs, they positively took the stress and were more concerned to perform well and take more responsibilities to show their skills and capabilities. Depending on its intensity, stress can either improve or impair work performance. Lack of stress limits the challenges that can be faced on the job, and performance suffers. For the reason that stress makes it easier for a person to gather and apply resources to meet job needs, job

performance generally tends to improve as stress levels rise gradually. Everyone needs some amount of stress to be content, inspired, engaged, and productive throughout life. Stress can also result in improved performance by increasing the tasks and responsibilities that will motivate workers to perform better at work. Teachers with higher EI can better handle stressful events and situations. Employees can comprehend and recognize their feelings using EI ideas, they will be able to make better decisions in their job and personal lives. One's ability to make wise decisions, preserve cooperative relationships, effectively handle stress, and adapt to change are all enhanced by having a high degree of EI.

The study has a few of implications considering the COVID-19 epidemic. Since EI can be learnt, teachers should have access to specialized preventative programs that boost EI to help them better notice, regulate, and manage their emotions under difficult working conditions. Teachers should be provided with technical assistance, and free access to learningsupportive programs to increase job performance. Additionally, to improve the wellbeing of teachers during the pandemic, prevention and intervention activities should be centred on reducing negative feelings, distress, anxiety, and depression. This study cannot be generalized because it was limited to Sharjah and Ajman in the United Arab Emirates.

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