

An examination of emotional intelligence levels and academic self-efficacy of students in higher education institutions providing sports education

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Abstract

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Aim: In this study, it was aimed to determine the emotional intelligence levels and academic self-efficacy of students studying in higher education institutions that provide sports education, and to examine whether there is a significant difference according to personal characteristics. To this end, the relational screening model, one of the quantitative research methods, was employed. **Method:** The universe of the research consists of students enrolled in the physical education and sports teaching, coaching education, sports management, and recreation departments of sports science faculties at state universities in Turkey during the 2021–2022 academic year. The sample consists of 905 university students selected by simple random sampling from Selçuk University, Yildirim Beyazıt University, Niğde Ömer Halis Demir University, and Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, all located in the Central Anatolia region. Data were collected through three instruments: the Personal Information Form, the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale, and the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale. **Results:** Correlation analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and the Optimism/Mood Regulation and Evaluation of Emotions sub-factors of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale, while no significant relationship was found with the Use of Emotions sub-factor. Regression analysis confirmed that Optimism/Mood Regulation and Evaluation of Emotions significantly predicted academic self-efficacy ($p < .05$), together explaining 6.4% of the total variance, whereas Use of Emotions did not yield a significant predictive effect ($p > .05$). **Conclusion:** In conclusion, a significant model was established between the sub-factors of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale and academic self-efficacy. The findings suggest that variables such as living environment, family attitudes, and cultural values influence individuals' emotional states, which in turn affect various aspects of their lives. Future studies incorporating qualitative methods are recommended to add further depth to these findings.

Introduction

Although emotion and intelligence may initially appear to be two distinct constructs, their integration under the concept of emotional intelligence has been shown to exert a profound influence on individuals' lives. Since its emergence, emotional intelligence has gained substantial attention across various disciplines, including education, organizational behavior, psychology, and sports sciences. A review of the literature reveals a wide range of definitions and empirical studies, indicating the conceptual richness and multidisciplinary relevance of emotional intelligence.

Intelligence is generally defined as the ability to establish cause–effect relationships between events and phenomena, to think logically and meaningfully, to

distinguish between positive and negative situations, and to effectively cope with problems encountered in the external environment (Doğan & Şahin, 2009). Furthermore, emotional intelligence can be described as a set of competencies, skills, and adaptive mechanisms that enable individuals to cope effectively with environmental demands and pressures (Johnson & Indvik, 1999). Similarly, intelligence has been described as the capacity of the mind to learn, to benefit from acquired knowledge, to adapt to new situations, and to develop novel solutions (Öktem, 2001). While intelligence was initially conceptualized primarily in terms of numerical and verbal abilities, it has subsequently evolved into a multidimensional construct encompassing multiple domains of intelligence rather than a single, unified ability (Ayhan, 2004).

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Emotion, on the other hand, is defined by Goleman (2011) as a combination of specific thoughts associated with distinct feelings, accompanied by physiological and psychological states and various behavioral tendencies. Mayer et al. (1999) conceptualize emotions as a complex interaction network that integrates physiological reactions, mental awareness, and cognitive appraisal processes. Within this framework, emotions play a central role in shaping individuals' responses to environmental stimuli.

The concept of self-efficacy can be more comprehensively understood through Bandura's social cognitive theory. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy refers to an individual's internal belief in their capability to successfully manage challenges and overcome difficulties. This belief directly influences individuals' ability to control life-related struggles and adapt to their environment.

Self-efficacy beliefs have been shown to affect individuals' decision-making processes and to contribute to the development of predictable problem-solving skills when confronting challenges (Alabay, 2006). From another perspective, self-efficacy is defined as a guiding psychological construct that shapes how individuals sustain their lives, achieve success, and cope with difficulties (Greenstein, 2000). While general self-efficacy reflects an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a task, academic self-efficacy refers to the perceived confidence in fulfilling academic responsibilities in accordance with established standards (Gore, 2006). Academic self-efficacy represents an important cognitive-motivational construct that reflects individuals' internal confidence in their capacity to cope with academic tasks effectively (Millburg, 2009).

Methods

The population of the study consisted of students enrolled during the 2021–2022 academic year in the departments of Physical Education and Sports Teaching, Coaching Education, Sports Management, and Recreation within the Faculties of Sport Sciences at state universities in Türkiye. The sample of the study comprised 905 undergraduate students selected through a simple random sampling method from among students studying in the Faculties of Sport Sciences at Selçuk University, Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, and Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, all of which are located in the Central Anatolia Region of Türkiye. Ethical approval for the

implementation of the measurement instruments was obtained from the Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Sport Sciences at Selçuk University, with the decision dated 31/05/2022 and numbered 2022/68.

The data collection instruments used in the study consisted of three sections. These included a Personal Information Form (gender, grade level, mother's education level, father's education level, parents' marital status, parents' employment status, family income level, number of siblings, place of residence, current accommodation, and sport branch of interest), the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale, which consists of 41 items and three sub-dimensions and was adapted into Turkish by Tatar et al. (2011) based on a sample of 1,743 individuals, and the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale, which consists of 33 items and three sub-dimensions and was adapted into Turkish by Ekici (2012) based on a sample of 683 university students.

In order to examine the normality of the total and sub-dimension scores of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale and the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale, skewness and kurtosis values were taken into consideration. For the sub-dimensions of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale, the skewness and kurtosis values were as follows: Optimism/Mood Regulation (Skewness = -0.309 ; Kurtosis = -0.367), Appraisal of Emotions (Skewness = 0.008 ; Kurtosis = 0.002), and Utilization of Emotions (Skewness = -0.221 ; Kurtosis = 0.186). The total score of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale yielded skewness and kurtosis values of 0.406 and -0.003 , respectively. For the sub-dimensions of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale, the values were as follows: Social Status (Skewness = 0.139 ; Kurtosis = -0.236), Cognitive Applications (Skewness = 0.159 ; Kurtosis = -0.146), and Technical Skills (Skewness = 0.152 ; Kurtosis = -0.303). The total score of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale showed skewness and kurtosis values of 0.187 and 0.078 , respectively. All skewness and kurtosis values were found to be within the acceptable normality range (± 1), indicating that the data did not show a significant deviation from a normal distribution. Hair et al. (2009) stated that skewness and kurtosis values between -1 and $+1$ can be interpreted as evidence of normally distributed data. Based on these analyses, the data were considered to be normally distributed, and the use of parametric statistical tests was deemed appropriate.

To examine the relationships between variables, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r)

was employed, while multiple regression analysis was used to determine the effects of independent variables on the dependent variable. In interpreting the results of the correlation analyses, both the significance level (p) and the correlation coefficient (r) were taken into account. A confidence level of 0.95 was adopted for statistical significance, and correlation coefficients were interpreted according to the following criteria: $r > 0.80$ = strong relationship, $0.80 > r > 0.50$ = moderate relationship, and $r < 0.50$ = weak relationship (Can, 2014). The level of statistical significance for all analyses was set at $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$.

Result

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that 247 (27.3%) of the students of the faculty of sport sciences study in the Department of Coaching Education, 286 (31.6%) in the Department of Physical Education and Sports Teaching, 70 (7.7%) in the Department of Recreation, and 302 (33.4%) in the Department of Sports Management.

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that 468 (51.7%) of the students are male and 437 (48.3%) are female. In terms of academic standing, 196 (21.7%) are 1st-grade, 203 (22.4%) are 2nd-grade, 240 (26.5%) are 3rd-grade, and 266 (29.4%) are 4th-grade students. Regarding maternal education level, 307 (33.9%) of their mothers

are primary school graduates, 241 (26.6%) are middle school graduates, 247 (27.3%) are high school graduates, 80 (8.8%) are university graduates, and 30 (3.4%) hold a postgraduate degree. As for paternal education level, 224 (24.8%) of their fathers are primary school graduates, 207 (22.9%) are middle school graduates, 279 (30.8%) are high school graduates, 157 (17.3%) are university graduates, and 38 (4.2%) hold a postgraduate degree. Looking at their current residence, 319 (35.2%) live with their parents, 228 (25.2%) live in a student house, and 301 (33.3%) reside in a student dormitory. Furthermore, 767 (84.8%) of the students' parents live together, while 138 (15.2%) are separated. In terms of parental employment status, 460 (50.8%) report that only the father is employed, 72 (8.0%) that only the mother is employed, 290 (32.0%) that both parents are employed, and 83 (9.2%) that neither parent is employed.

Table 1

Numerical distribution of the students in the research sample according to their departments.

Departments	f	%
Coaching Education	247	27.3
Physical Education and Sports Teaching	286	31.6
Recreation	70	7.7
Sports Management	302	33.4

Table 2

Numerical distribution of the students in the research sample according to their personal characteristics.

Variables		f	%			f	%
Gender	Female	437	48.3	Parental Marital Status	Together	767	84.8
	Male	468	51.7		Separated	138	15.2
Grade	1st Grade	196	21.7	Parents' Employment Status	Father is employed	460	50.8
	2nd Grade	203	22.4		Mother is employed	72	8.0
	3rd Grade	240	26.5		Both parents are employed	290	32.0
	4th Grade	266	29.4		Both parents are employed	83	9.2
Mother's Education	Primary School	307	33.9	Family Income Level	11000 TL and below	56	6.2
	Middle School	241	26.6		11001-14000 TL	60	6.6
	High School	247	27.3		14001-17000 TL	111	12.3
	University	80	8.8		17001-20000 TL	250	27.6
	Postgraduate	30	3.4		20001 TL and above	428	47.3
Father's Education	Primary School	224	24.8	Number of Siblings	1 sibling	122	13.5
	Middle School	207	22.9		2 siblings	237	26.2
	High School	279	30.8		3 siblings	283	31.3
	University	157	17.3		4 siblings	167	18.5
	Postgraduate	38	4.2		5 or more siblings	96	10.5
Current Residence	Mother	46	5.1	Place of Residence	Village-Town	69	7.6
	Father	11	1.2		District	174	19.2
	Parent	319	35.2		City	262	29.0
	Student House	228	25.2		Metropolitan City	400	44.2
	Student Dormitory	301	33.3	Sports Preference	Individual Sports	472	52.2
					Team Sports	433	47.8

Regarding monthly family income, 56 (6.2%) have an income of 11,000 TL and below, 60 (6.6%) between 11,001–14,000 TL, 111 (12.3%) between 14,001–17,000 TL, 250 (27.6%) between 17,001–20,000 TL, and 428 (47.3%) 20,001 TL and above. In terms of family size, 122 (13.5%) have one sibling, 237 (26.2%) have two siblings, 283 (31.3%) have three siblings, 167 (18.5%) have four siblings, and 96 (10.5%) have five or more siblings. Additionally, 69 (7.6%) of the participants spent most of their lives in villages/towns, 174 (19.2%) in districts, 262 (29.0%) in cities, and 400 (44.2%) in metropolitan cities. Finally, it was observed that 472 (52.2%) of the students prefer individual sports, whereas 433 (47.8%) prefer team sports (Table 2).

Table 3

Minimum, maximum, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation values of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (n=905).

Sub-dimensions	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Optimism/Mood Regulation	1.19	5.00	3.46	.72
Appraisal of Emotions	1.31	5.00	3.32	.66
Use of Emotions	1.14	5.00	3.15	.64
Total Emotional Intelligence	1.39	4.88	3.36	.48

As shown in Table 3, it is understood that the students obtained a mean score of 3.46 ± 0.72 from the Optimism/Mood Regulation sub-dimension of the emotional intelligence scale, indicating a moderate level; a mean score of 3.32 ± 0.66 from the Appraisal of Emotions sub-dimension, indicating a moderate level; a mean score of 3.15 ± 0.64 from the Use of Emotions sub-dimension, indicating a moderate level; and a mean score of 3.36 ± 0.48 from the total Emotional Intelligence Scale, again indicating a moderate level.

As shown in Table 4, it is understood that the students obtained a mean score of 3.17 ± 0.70 from the Social Status sub-dimension of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale, indicating a moderate level; a mean score of 3.27 ± 0.68 from the Cognitive Applications sub-dimension, indicating a moderate level; a mean score of 3.12 ± 0.85 from the Technical Skills sub-dimension, indicating a moderate level; and a mean score of 3.22 ± 0.64 from the total Academic Self-Efficacy Scale, again indicating a moderate level.

Table 4

Minimum, maximum, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation values of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale.

Sub-dimensions	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Social Status	1.30	5.00	3.17	.70
Cognitive Applications	1.47	5.00	3.27	.68
Technical Skills	1.00	5.00	3.12	.85
Total Academic Self-Efficacy	1.52	5.00	3.22	.64

Findings Regarding the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Academic Self-Efficacy

As a result of the correlation analysis, as seen in Table 5, a positive and statistically significant relationship was determined between the total score of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale and the Optimism/Mood Regulation ($r = 0.146$) and Appraisal of Emotions ($r = 0.225$) sub-factors of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale, whereas no statistically significant relationship was determined between Academic Self-Efficacy and the Use of Emotions sub-factor ($r = 0.022$).

As shown in Table 6, academic self-efficacy forms a significant model with the sub-factors of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale. Optimism/Mood Regulation, Appraisal of Emotions, and Use of Emotions explain 6.4% of the total variance ($R = 0.252$, $R^2 = 0.064$, $F(3,904) = 20.442$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). As a result of the regression analysis, it was found that there is a positive relationship between academic self-efficacy and Optimism/Mood Regulation ($\beta = 0.076$; $p < 0.05$) and Appraisal of Emotions ($\beta = 0.241$; $p < 0.05$), whereas the predictive effect of the Use of Emotions ($\beta = -0.074$; $p > 0.05$) emotional intelligence sub-factor on academic self-efficacy was not statistically significant.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationships between emotional intelligence and academic self-efficacy among students enrolled in faculties of sport sciences. The descriptive characteristics of the sample indicate that participants represented different departments and class levels within sport sciences, providing an appropriate basis for interpreting emotional and academic variables in a multidimensional educational context.

Table 5

Correlation analysis results between variables.

		Emotional Intelligence		
		Optimism/Mood Regulation	Appraisal of Emotions	Use of Emotions
Total Academic Self-Efficacy	<i>r</i>	.146**	.225**	.022
	<i>p</i>	.000	.000	.499

* $p < 0.05$ and ** $p < 0.01$ indicate statistical significance.

Table 6

Linear regression analysis regarding the prediction of academic self-efficacy by the sub-factors of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	B	Standard Error	β	t	p
Academic Self-Efficacy	(Constant)	2.458	.158		15.541	.000*
	Optimism/Mood Regulation	.067	.031	.076	2.165	.031*
	Appraisal of Emotions	.230	.037	.241	6.195	.000*
	Use of Emotions	-.073	.038	-.074	-1.921	.055
Multiple R= .252 R^2 =.064						
Adj R^2 = .061 $F_{(3,904)} = 20.442$, $p=0.00 < .05$						

p<0.05* indicates statistical significance.

The findings revealed that students' overall emotional intelligence levels were at a moderate level, with participants demonstrating a certain degree of competence in recognizing and regulating their emotions. This result is consistent with previous research conducted among university students and students in applied disciplines, indicating that emotional intelligence is typically developed to a moderate extent during higher education (Petrides et al., 2007; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2020). Given that emotional intelligence is considered a malleable and learnable construct (Mayer et al., 2008), these findings highlight the potential for further development of emotional competencies through structured educational and psychosocial interventions, particularly in sport-related academic settings characterized by competition, stress, and interpersonal interaction.

Similarly, academic self-efficacy levels were found to be moderate across all sub-dimensions. From the perspective of Bandura's social cognitive theory (1997), this reflects not only cognitive competence but also emotional states, prior mastery experiences, and social persuasion. In sport sciences education, where theoretical knowledge is combined with performance-based and practical requirements, students' self-efficacy perceptions may fluctuate depending on contextual demands (Zimmerman, 2000), suggesting that additional support is needed to strengthen their confidence in academic performance.

Analysis of the relationships between variables demonstrated that academic self-efficacy was positively and significantly associated with the emotional intelligence sub-dimensions of optimism/mood regulation and appraisal of emotions, whereas no significant relationship was found with the use of emotions. These findings suggest that the ability to recognize and regulate emotional states may be more influential for self-efficacy beliefs than the ability to actively utilize emotions for goal-directed behavior, which aligns with control-value theory emphasizing the

central role of emotion regulation and emotional awareness in academic motivation and self-beliefs (Pekrun, 2006). The absence of a significant relationship with the use of emotions may be explained by the contextual specificity of this component, which is more salient in performance, leadership, and social domains than in academic settings (Zeidner et al., 2012; Trigueros et al., 2019).

Regression analysis indicated that the emotional intelligence sub-dimensions collectively formed a statistically significant predictive model for academic self-efficacy, with optimism/mood regulation and appraisal of emotions emerging as significant predictors, while the use of emotions did not contribute significantly to the model. Although the explained variance was relatively low ($R^2 = 0.064$), this finding should be interpreted with caution, as academic self-efficacy is a complex, multidetermined construct influenced by a wide range of cognitive, motivational, environmental, and pedagogical factors (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020), and even modest effect sizes may be theoretically meaningful in psychological and educational research.

The limited yet significant predictive power of emotional intelligence supports the growing body of literature suggesting that emotional intelligence influences academic outcomes primarily through indirect mechanisms such as motivation, resilience, learning strategies, and self-efficacy (MacCann et al., 2020; Perera & DiGiacomo, 2013). In this context, emotional intelligence appears to function as a supportive psychological resource that enhances students' adaptive responses to academic challenges rather than as a direct determinant of academic success, consistent with prior studies emphasizing the role of emotional competencies in fostering academic adjustment, persistence, and perceived competence (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2016; Mega et al., 2014).

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that certain dimensions of emotional intelligence—particularly optimism/mood regulation and appraisal of emotions—are positively associated with and predictive of academic self-efficacy among students in faculties of sport sciences. However, the magnitude of this relationship is limited, suggesting that emotional intelligence alone is not a dominant determinant of academic self-efficacy, but rather a complementary psychological factor.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that:

- Educational programs in sport sciences incorporate training aimed at enhancing emotional awareness, emotion regulation, and stress management skills.
- Psychoeducational interventions designed to strengthen academic self-efficacy be integrated into student support services.
- Future research examine the mediating and moderating roles of variables such as academic motivation, resilience, learning strategies, and academic anxiety to better understand the mechanisms linking emotional intelligence and academic self-efficacy.

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Author Contributions

Conceptualization: MK, ET; Data Collection: MK; Data Curation: MK; Formal Analysis: MK, ET; Investigation: MK, ET; Writing – Original Draft: MK; Writing – Review & Editing: ET; Visualization: MK; Supervision: ET.

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Sport Sciences at Selçuk University (Decision No: 2022/68, Date: 31/05/2022) and was carried out in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that there was no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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