

# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, GRATITUDE AND FORGIVENESS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Mohsina Naeem<sup>a\*</sup>, Aqsa Zaheer<sup>b</sup>, & Muhammad Luqman Khan<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a,b,c</sup>Department of Psychology, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

\*Correspondence to: Mohsina Naeem, Department of Psychology, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Pakistan. E-mail: mohsinanaeem5@gmail.com. ORCID: 0009-0007-7143-3013

## KEYWORDS

Emotional Intelligence, Gratitude, Forgiveness

## CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Naeem, M., & Zaheer, A., & Muhammad, L. K. (2024). Emotional intelligence, gratitude and forgiveness among university students. *Pakistan Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1(1), 8-14.

## ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the associations among emotional intelligence, gratitude and forgiveness in university students. Additionally, the research aimed to examine gender differences and differences in public and private sector universities in social emotional intelligence, gratitude and forgiveness. A sample of 200 participants (i.e., 100 men & 100 women) was selected from various universities using a convenient sampling technique. The study employed a cross-sectional research design and data analysis was conducted using SPSS version-23. The study's outcomes provided strong empirical support, affirming a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and gratitude among university students. Furthermore, the results confirmed a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and forgiveness, while also indicating a positive and significant relationship between gratitude and forgiveness among university students. The findings additionally revealed no noteworthy disparities in emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness between male and female students. Similarly, the results suggested the absence of significant differences between students from public and private institutes concerning emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in enhancing academic performance by enabling students to adeptly handle stress, navigate social interactions, and stay focused on academic pursuits. Gratitude and forgiveness further contribute to a positive emotional state, fostering an environment conducive to learning. Universities strategically integrate programs targeting emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness to bolster overall student well-being, promoting resilience and positive relationships. Recognizing the challenges of university life, where stress and mental health concerns can arise, emotional intelligence equips students with effective stress management and emotional regulation skills (Trish, 2023). Practices of gratitude and forgiveness are linked to improved mental well-being, providing valuable tools for coping with stressors and supporting mental health in the university setting. These concepts extend beyond academia, with emotional intelligence being crucial in the professional world. Introducing students to these skills prepares them for successful careers, where gratitude and forgiveness contribute to positive workplace relationships and effective teamwork, essential for professional success (Salgado-Levano et al., 2024). Moreover, ethical and moral development is nurtured through discussions on gratitude and forgiveness, aligning with universities' role in shaping students' values. These concepts cultivate a sense of responsibility, empathy, and moral reasoning, contributing to the broader goal of fostering ethical and responsible citizens. The positive impact of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness extends to the

campus climate. Students embodying these qualities contribute to a supportive and harmonious community, enhancing the overall university experience. In conclusion, the strategic integration of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness into university education serves as a holistic approach to fostering academic success, personal development, and well-being. These initiatives align with the broader mission of universities to provide an enriching educational experience that prepares students for a successful and fulfilling life beyond academia. an atmosphere conducive to learning, collaboration, and personal growth (Fuertes, 2024).

### **Emotional Intelligence and Gratitude**

Empathy as a component of emotional intelligence was identified as a crucial quality for physicians and medical trainees. After adjusting for demographics, trait emotional intelligence and gratitude demonstrated positive associations with perspective taking and empathic concern. Personal distress was shown to have a high negative correlation with trait emotional intelligence, but appreciation showed a marginally favorable correlation. According to the study, trait emotional intelligence and thankfulness are crucial psychological concepts for understanding medical students' empathy. Designing intervention techniques and programs to improve medical students' professional abilities requires an appreciation of their beneficial roles (Shi & Du, 2020). Several studies had investigated the risk factors, protective factors, and consequences of cyber-bullying on the psychological well-being of adolescents (Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2020; Noreen & Iqbal, 2024). Two personal resources that have been found to have good benefits on young people's social, psychological, and physical well-being are gratitude and emotional intelligence. The factors under study showed substantial relationships, according to Chamizo-Nieto et al. (2020). Furthermore, even after adjusting for the impacts of sociodemographic factors, the structural equation model study verified that emotional intelligence dimensions were tangentially related to cyber-aggression through thankfulness. These results provide an explanation for why teens with high emotional intelligence behave less aggressively when it comes to cyberbullying and point to the possibility of using gratitude treatments to lessen teens' use of technology to engage in hostile conduct.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Forgiveness**

A study on the relationship between the tendency to express forgiveness, purpose, and religiosity, emotional intelligence and self-concept was examined. The study proposed a favorable relationship between emotional intelligence and self-concept and manifestations of religiosity, forgiveness, and purpose. While religiosity was negatively connected to emotional intelligence but not to self-concept, purpose was favorably related to self-concept but not emotional intelligence. Although these differences did not achieve statistical significance, analysis by gender suggested that women may be more likely than males to have robust relationships. The study's unexpected findings underscore the necessity for further empirical investigations into the psychological correlates of forgiveness, purpose, and religiosity in children (Van Dyke & Elias, 2008). Another study investigated the predictive role of spiritual and emotional intelligence in students' forgiveness. However, spiritual intelligence did not emerge as a significant predictor of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. The findings and subsequent discussion suggested that spiritual intelligence may differ from spirituality (Amani et al., 2014). There is lack of literature observed on the differences in public and private sector universities in social emotional intelligence, gratitude and forgiveness. The objectives of the current study are given below;

1. To explore the relationship between emotional intelligence, gratitude and forgiveness among university students.
2. To explore the gender differences and differences in public and private sector universities in terms of emotional intelligence, gratitude and forgiveness among university students.

## **II. METHOD**

### **Participants**

Cross sectional survey research design was used for this study. The sample comprised 200 university students from different private and public sector universities of Faisalabad. Both males and females are included in this population from Faisalabad. Participants age range was between 18 to 30. Convenient sampling technique was employed for current study. In terms of gender representation, the study exhibited an equal distribution, with 50%

of the participants identified as men and the remaining 50% as women. Regarding age categories, the majority of participants fell within the 18-24 age range, constituting 55% of the total sample. In contrast, the 25-30 age group represented 45% of the participants.

### Measures

Following measures were used for data collection. **[1]** In this study, emotional intelligence was measured using the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) (Schutte et al., 1998). Respondents assess their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), for each of the test's 33 items. In order to determine a final score for the SSEIT, the individual item scores are usually added together. Elevated scores are a sign of increased emotional intelligence. The scale's Cronbach's alpha is 0.90. **[2]** A tool for measuring well-being and gratitude is the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six-Item Form (GQ-6) (McCullough et al., 2002). The purpose of the questionnaire is to gauge a person's propensity for feeling thankful on a regular basis. In the GQ-6, participants rate how much they agree with each of the six statements about gratitude on a 7-point Likert scale that goes from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores signify a higher level of thankfulness. The scores are added together to get the overall score. The gratitude scale's Cronbach's alpha is 0.82. **[3]** Boonyarit et al. (2013) developed the Forgiveness Scale as a tool to gauge forgiveness. Participants use a Likert scale to indicate how much they agree or disagree with each statement, often ranging from 1 (I'm always wrong) to 6 (I'm always right). Higher scores indicate a higher level of forgiveness. The final score is determined by adding the scores for each item. The thankfulness scale's Cronbach's alpha is 0.85.

### Procedure

Permission was taken from universities. Before any data was collected, the research participants gave their informed consent. Along with the measures, the participants also received a demographic sheet. The study effort was conducted with ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and debriefing. A frequency distribution was utilized to calculate the frequency and percentage of variables. Using descriptive statistics, the average score for each variable was determined. The relationship between the variables was ascertained by correlation analysis. An independent t-test statistical analysis to determine the significance difference between these variables. The statistical version SPSS version-23 was used for data analysis with a significance level of less than 0.05 applied to all analyses.

## III. RESULTS

**Table 1: Psychometric Properties of Emotional Intelligence, Gratitude and Forgiveness**

| Scales  | SD    | M      | Range  | $\alpha$ |
|---|-------|--------|--------|----------|
| Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test | 15.26 | 110.12 | 67-134 | .79      |
| Gratitude Questionnaire-Six-Item Form           | 12.11 | 54.42  | 10-42  | .70      |
| Forgiveness Scale                               | 9.48  | 56.45  | 28-74  | .75      |

The psychometric properties of were assessed in table 1. All measures exhibited satisfactory internal consistency with an  $\alpha$  of greater than 0.70 in all measures used in the study.

**Table 2: Bivariate Correlation between Emotional Intelligence, Gratitude and Forgiveness among University Students**

| Variables                 | 1  | 2     | 3     |
|---------------------------|----|-------|-------|
| 1. Emotional Intelligence | -- | .54** | .60** |
| 2. Gratitude              |    | --    | .35** |
| 3. Forgiveness            |    |       | --    |

\*\* $p < .01$

The bivariate correlation analysis among university students revealed significant positive correlations between emotional intelligence and gratitude ( $r = 0.54$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), emotional intelligence and forgiveness ( $r = 0.60$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ),

and gratitude and forgiveness ( $r = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These findings suggest that higher level of emotional intelligence is associated with increased levels of gratitude and forgiveness. Additionally, there is a positive relationship between gratitude and forgiveness.

**Table 3: Mean Differences between Men and Women in terms of Emotional Intelligence, Gratitude and Forgiveness among University Students**

| Variables              | Men    |      | Women  |       | $t(198)$ | $p$ |
|------------------------|--------|------|--------|-------|----------|-----|
|                        | $M$    | $SD$ | $M$    | $SD$  |          |     |
| Emotional Intelligence | 109.82 | 15.0 | 110.42 | 15.5  | .29      | .76 |
| Gratitude              | 27.59  | 5.95 | 26.83  | 6.16  | .88      | .37 |
| Forgiveness            | 56.11  | 8.98 | 56.79  | 10.01 | .50      | .61 |

The mean differences between men and women university students in terms of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness were examined. For emotional intelligence, there was a no difference, with males having a mean score of 109.82 and females having a mean score of 110.42,  $t(198) = 0.29$ ,  $p = 0.76$ . Similarly, for gratitude, the mean score for men was 27.59, and for women, it was 26.83,  $t(198) = 0.88$ ,  $p = 0.37$ , indicating a no difference. Regarding forgiveness, the mean score for men was 56.11, and for women, it was 56.79,  $t(198) = 0.50$ ,  $p = 0.61$ , reflecting a no difference between the two gender groups. Overall, the results suggest that there were non-significant gender-based variations in emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness among university students.

**Table 4: Mean Difference between Public and Private Universities in terms of Emotional Intelligence, Gratitude and Forgiveness among University Students**

| Variables              | Public Universities |      | Private Universities |       | $t(198)$ | $p$ |
|------------------------|---------------------|------|----------------------|-------|----------|-----|
|                        | $M$                 | $SD$ | $M$                  | $SD$  |          |     |
| Emotional Intelligence | 108.26              | 16.4 | 111.23               | 14.50 | 1.33     | .18 |
| Gratitude              | 26.98               | 6.35 | 27.33                | 5.90  | .39      | .69 |
| Forgiveness            | 56.38               | 9.43 | 56.48                | 9.55  | .07      | .94 |

The mean differences between students from public and private universities in terms of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness were examined. For emotional intelligence, the mean score for students from public sector universities was 108.26, while for students from private universities, it was 111.23,  $t(198) = 1.33$ ,  $p = 0.18$ , suggesting a non-significant difference. Regarding gratitude, the mean score for students from public universities was 26.98, and for students from private universities, it was 27.33,  $t(198) = 0.39$ ,  $p = 0.69$ , indicating a no difference. Similarly, for forgiveness, the mean score for students from public universities was 56.38, and for students from private universities, it was 56.48,  $t(198) = 0.07$ ,  $p = 0.94$ , reflecting no difference. Overall, the results suggest that there were no significant differences between students from public and private sector universities in terms of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness.

## IV.DISCUSSION

In this study, it was assumed that there would be significant relationship between emotional intelligence and gratitude among university students. Findings through Pearson correlation on table-2 indicates that significant positive relationship existed between emotional intelligence and gratitude among university students. The findings from the earlier research conducted by Sharma (2021) indicate a significant relationship exists between emotional intelligence and gratitude. This aligns with our current study results, reinforcing the notion that higher emotional intelligence is linked to higher levels of gratitude. The significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and gratitude among university students implies that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to exhibit higher levels of gratitude. Emotional intelligence, which involves understanding and managing one's emotions and effectively interacting with others, may contribute to a greater appreciation for positive

aspects in life, fostering a sense of gratitude. This finding suggests that interventions or educational programs aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence could potentially have positive spill over effects on gratitude levels among university students. Developing emotional intelligence skills might contribute to a more positive and appreciative outlook on life, benefiting overall well-being and interpersonal relationships (Geng, 2018).

Findings through Pearson correlation on table-2 indicates that significant positive relationship exists between emotional intelligence and forgiveness among university students. The findings of a prior study by Wilks et al. (2014) show a significant relationship between forgiveness and emotional intelligence among college students. This supports and validates the results of our current study, which aligns with its findings. Higher emotional intelligence is positively correlated with a better capacity for forgiveness, according to the positive and substantial association between the two variables among college students. The development of empathy, understanding, and emotional regulation—all essential elements of forgiveness—may be aided by emotional intelligence, which includes the capacity to recognize and control emotions. Students with higher emotional intelligence may be more adept at navigating interpersonal conflicts, empathizing with others' perspectives, and letting go of negative emotions associated with transgressions. This finding suggests that interventions or educational efforts targeting the development of emotional intelligence skills could potentially contribute to the promotion of forgiveness among university students. Enhancing emotional intelligence may empower individuals to cultivate more positive and harmonious relationships, positively impacting their overall psychological well-being (Costa et al., 2013).

Findings revealed no significant gender differences in emotional intelligence, gratitude and forgiveness among university students (i.e., table-3). The absence of non-significant gender differences in emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness suggests that, on average, men and women in the studied population exhibit similar levels of these psychological constructs. This finding implies that gender does not play a significant role in determining variations in emotional intelligence, gratitude, or forgiveness among university students in this context. Therefore, any potential intervention or educational programs aimed at enhancing these psychological attributes may be applicable and effective across both men and women student populations. It emphasizes the need for inclusive approaches that consider individual differences rather than relying on gender-specific strategies in interventions targeting emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness (Khan & Singh, 2013). Furthermore, non-significant differences were found between students from public and private sector universities in terms of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness. The absence of significant differences between students from public and private sector universities in terms of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness suggests that, on average, individuals from both types of institutions exhibit similar levels of these psychological attributes. This finding has implications for understanding the universality of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness across different educational settings. It implies that the type of institute (public or private) may not be a determining factor in variations related to these psychological constructs. Consequently, interventions or educational programs aimed at fostering emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness could be universally applicable and effective across students from diverse educational backgrounds. It emphasizes the importance of addressing these aspects in a holistic manner, considering individual differences rather than focusing solely on institutional distinctions (Ahsan et al., 2023).

## V. CONCLUSION

The study findings provided strong empirical support, affirming a positive and significant correlation between emotional intelligence and gratitude among university students. Furthermore, the results underscored a positive and significant link between emotional intelligence and forgiveness, while also indicating a positive and significant relationship between gratitude and forgiveness among university students. The findings additionally revealed no noteworthy disparities in emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness between male and female students. Similarly, the results suggested the absence of significant differences between students from government and private institutes concerning emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness. The study's participants consisted of university students. To enhance the robustness of future research, it is recommended to adopt a more diverse approach in sample selection by including participants from various universities across different cities. While the current study employed a cross-sectional research design, conducting a longitudinal study on the same topic is



suggested for increased effectiveness and comprehensive data collection. An acknowledged limitation of the present study lies in its reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce potential bias. To attain a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena, upcoming studies might consider incorporating interview methods. Although the participant selection in this study relied on convenient sampling, using random sampling in future research is crucial to ensure an unbiased and accurate representation of the population.

#### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

#### Funding

The author received no funding from any organizations.

## VI. REFERENCES

- Ahsan, U., Zeb, R., & Arzeen, S. (2023). Can Emotional Intelligence and Forgiveness bring a Difference? Comparison between Clinically Diagnosed Individuals and Normal Population. *Pakistan Journal of Medical & Health Sciences*, 17(05), 513-517. <https://doi.org/10.53350/pjmhs2023175513>
- Amani, M., Shiri, E., & Rajabi, S. (2014). The Role of Spiritual and Emotional Intelligence in Predicting of Students's Forgiveness. *Knowledge & Research in Applied Psychology*, 15(1), 73–80.
- Boonyarit, I., Chuawanlee, W., Macaskill, A., & Supparerkchaisakul, N. (2013). A Psychometric Analysis of the Workplace Forgiveness Scale. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 9(2), 319-338. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v9i2.551>
- Chamizo-Nieto, M. T., Rey, L., & Pellitteri, J. (2020). Gratitude and Emotional Intelligence as Protective Factors against Cyber-Aggression: Analysis of a Mediation Model. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(12), Article 12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124475>
- Costa, H., Ripoll Botella, P., Sánchez, M., & Carvalho, C. (2013). Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy: Effects on Psychological Well-Being in College Students. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 16, E50. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sjp.2013.39>
- Fuertes, A. (2024). Students in Higher Education Explore the Practice of Gratitude as Spirituality and Its Impact on Well-Being. *Religions*, 15(9), 1078.
- Geng, Y. (2018). Gratitude mediates the effect of emotional intelligence on subjective well-being: A structural equation modeling analysis. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 23(10), 1378–1386. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105316677295>
- Khan, I., & Singh, N. (2013). A Study on Gender Differences on Gratitude, Spirituality and Forgiveness Among School Teachers. *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, 1(1), 9-14.
- McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J.-A. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(1), 112–127. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.1.112>
- Noreen, Z., & Iqbal, M. (2024). The Consequences of Cyberbullying on the Psychological Well-being of University Students. *Research Journal of Social Sciences and Economics Review*, 5(1), 36-46.
- Salgado-Levano, C., Grimaldo, M., Correa-Rojas, J., Mori-Sánchez, M. D. P., & Riveros-Paredes, P. (2024). Spiritual well-being and its influence on forgiveness, gratitude, and resilience in university students in Lima (Peru). *Ciencias Psicológicas*, 18(2).
- Schutte, N. S., Malouff, J. M., Hall, L. E., Haggerty, D. J., Cooper, J. T., Golden, C. J., & Dornheim, L. (1998). Development and validation of a measure of emotional intelligence. *Personality and individual differences*, 25(2), 167-177.
- Sharma, G. (2021). Relationship of gratitude and emotional intelligence with happiness among adolescents. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(2), 1468-1485.
- Shi, M., & Du, T. (2020). Associations of emotional intelligence and gratitude with empathy in medical students. *BMC Medical Education*, 20(1), 116. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02041-4>
- Trish, S. (2023). The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Education: Fostering Social and Emotional Learning in Schools. *Journal of Advanced Research in Education*, 2(5), 19-33.

- Van Dyke, C. J., & Elias, M. J. (2008). How Expressions of Forgiveness, Purpose, and Religiosity Relate to Emotional Intelligence and Self-Concept in Urban Fifth-Grade Students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 78(4), 481–493. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014451>
- Wilks, D., Neto, F., & Mavroveli, S. (2014). Trait emotional intelligence, forgiveness, and gratitude in Cape Verdean and Portuguese students. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 45, 93–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246314546347>