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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GRATITUDE, RESILIENCE, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN.

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Gratitude, Resilience, Emotional Intelligence, Academic Performance, Religious Affiliation, Pakistani Students, Higher Education	This study examined the relationships among gratitude, resilience, emotional intelligence, and academic performance in a sample of Muslim and non-Muslim university students in Pakistan, and tested whether religious affiliation was associated with differences in these variables. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was used with 300 university students (150 Muslim, 150 non-Muslim) recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Gratitude, resilience, and emotional intelligence were measured with standardized self-report scales, and academic performance was indexed by self-reported cumulative grade point average (CGPA). Because Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated significant departures from normality for all study variables, non-parametric statistics were used. Spearman correlations showed that gratitude ($r = .533$), resilience ($r = .503$), and emotional intelligence ($r = .566$) were each significantly and positively associated with CGPA ($p < .001$), and emotional intelligence and resilience were strongly correlated with each other ($r = .807$, $p < .001$). Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests indicated that Muslim students, older students (22-25 years), and postgraduate students scored higher on gratitude, resilience, and/or emotional intelligence than their counterparts, and that Muslim students had significantly higher CGPA ranks than non-Muslim students. These findings support the role of positive psychological resources in academic success and suggest that university support services should attend to students' emotional and religious-cultural context.
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Introduction

Higher education is increasingly understood to depend not only on cognitive ability but also on students' psychological and emotional resources. As university students navigate academic stressors, social pressures, and cultural expectations, non-cognitive strengths such as gratitude, resilience, and emotional intelligence have emerged as important correlates of academic success alongside traditional predictors like ability and study habits (Ahmed & Shahid, 2020). In Pakistan, where religious and cultural identity plays a central role in shaping students' emotional lives, it is important to understand whether these psychological resources operate similarly for Muslim and non-Muslim students, who together make up a religiously diverse higher-education population.

Although gratitude, resilience, and emotional intelligence have been linked to academic outcomes in Western samples, comparatively little research has examined how these constructs function in the religiously plural context of Pakistani universities, or whether religious affiliation moderates their relationship with academic performance. This gap is consequential: Islamic teachings emphasize concepts such as *sabr* (patience) and *shukr* (gratitude), which may shape emotional regulation and coping differently than the frameworks available to non-Muslim students. Understanding these patterns can help universities design more inclusive, culturally responsive counseling and academic support services.

Positive-psychology and developmental accounts offer complementary explanations for how these resources might support academic performance. Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory holds that positive emotions such as gratitude broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires and build lasting personal resources, including social support and cognitive flexibility, that can indirectly support academic functioning. The moral affect theory of gratitude (McCullough et al., 2001) frames gratitude as a moral emotion that strengthens social bonds and encourages prosocial, cooperative behavior. Masten's (2001) resilience theory conceptualizes resilience as the product of dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and environmental resources, enabling students to adapt to academic adversity. Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of emotional intelligence describes the abilities to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotion, competencies that support stress management, interpersonal functioning, and self-regulated learning. Academic performance itself is treated here as a multidimensional outcome shaped jointly by cognitive ability and emotional-psychological preparedness.

A growing body of research links gratitude, resilience, and emotional intelligence to academic functioning. Bono et al. (2020) and Jiang et al. (2021) found that gratitude predicted greater academic engagement and satisfaction among students, and Hartley (2022) and Souri and Hasanirad (2021) reported that more resilient students showed greater academic persistence, stability, and problem-solving capacity. Emotional intelligence has received perhaps the most consistent empirical support: in a meta-analysis, MacCann et al. (2020) found that emotional intelligence reliably predicted academic performance across educational levels and cultural settings, and Sánchez-Álvarez et al. (2021) linked emotional intelligence to subjective well-being,

a plausible pathway through which emotional skills support sustained academic engagement. Developmentally, Arnett et al. (2020) argued that emerging adulthood (approximately ages 18–29) is a period of continued identity formation and emotional maturation, which may explain why older university students tend to show stronger psychological resources than younger peers.

Within Pakistan specifically, prior studies (e.g., Ahmed & Shahid, 2020; Malik & Tariq, 2020) have linked resilience and emotional intelligence to academic achievement, and religious coping has been associated with a sense of shared meaning, self-control, and psychological toughness (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2021) that may support students facing academic and personal stressors. However, direct comparisons of Muslim and non-Muslim university students within a single Pakistani sample, examining gratitude, resilience, and emotional intelligence together, remain limited, which the present study sought to address.

The present study therefore investigated the relationships among gratitude, resilience, emotional intelligence, and academic performance (CGPA) among Muslim and non-Muslim university students in Pakistan, and examined whether these variables differed by religious affiliation and by demographic characteristics such as age, education level, and socioeconomic status. Gratitude, resilience, and emotional intelligence were treated as variables hypothesized to relate positively to academic performance, with religious affiliation (Muslim vs. non-Muslim) considered as a possible source of group differences in these relationships.

The study pursued four objectives: (1) to examine the relationship between gratitude and academic performance among Muslim and non-Muslim students; (2) to assess how resilience contributes to academic performance; (3) to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance across religious groups; and (4) to examine differences in gratitude, resilience, emotional intelligence, and academic performance across demographic variables (gender, socioeconomic status, education level, and age).

Five hypotheses were tested: (H1) resilience is positively correlated with academic performance, with the association stronger among Muslim students; (H2) students with higher emotional intelligence show better academic performance than those with lower emotional intelligence, across religious groups; (H3) Muslim and non-Muslim students differ in levels of gratitude, resilience, and emotional intelligence; (H4) students of higher socioeconomic status show higher resilience and gratitude; and (H5) older students show higher gratitude and resilience than younger students.

Method

Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was used to examine the relationships among gratitude, resilience, emotional intelligence, and academic performance, with religious affiliation considered as a grouping variable. Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was collected from all participants.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were 300 undergraduate and postgraduate students drawn from public and private universities in Pakistan, recruited through convenience and snowball sampling via online platforms (e.g., email, social media) and in-person data collection at universities and community settings. The sample was evenly split by religion (150 Muslim, 150 non-Muslim, including Christian, Hindu, and Sikh students). Inclusion criteria required full-time enrollment, a self-identified Muslim or non-Muslim religious affiliation, and informed consent; part-time or distance-learning students and questionnaires with incomplete responses were excluded.

Measures

Gratitude Scale (Urdu Version)

The Urdu-language Gratitude Scale (Shahid, 2022) is a 27-item self-report measure rated on a 5-point Likert scale, used to assess dispositional gratitude; prior research reports adequate reliability ($\alpha > .80$).

Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale

The 25-item Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003) assessed adaptability and stress-coping ability on a 5-point Likert scale ($\alpha > .89$).

Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (Urdu Version)

The Urdu version of the 16-item Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law, 2002) assessed four facets of emotional intelligence (self-emotion appraisal, others'-emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion) on a 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha > .85$).

Academic Performance and Demographic Form

Academic performance was operationalized as self-reported cumulative grade point average (CGPA) on a 4.0 scale, reported for the most recently completed semester. A researcher-designed demographic form collected age, gender, religion, education level, family system, area of residence, marital status, and socioeconomic status.

Procedure

Following institutional ethics approval, participants were informed about the study's purpose and their right to voluntary, confidential participation before providing consent. Data were collected through both online and paper-based questionnaires administered by trained research assistants; completion took approximately 20–25 minutes per participant. Data were screened for missing values and analyzed in SPSS (version 24). Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests assessed normality; because all key variables significantly deviated from a normal distribution, non-parametric tests were used throughout. Spearman's rho assessed bivariate associations among

gratitude, resilience, emotional intelligence, and CGPA. The Mann–Whitney U test compared two independent groups (e.g., Muslim vs. non-Muslim, male vs. female), and the Kruskal–Wallis H test compared three or more groups (e.g., CGPA categories, socioeconomic status levels).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 summarizes the demographic composition of the sample. Most participants were aged 22–25 years (69.0%), male (67.3%), and living in nuclear families (57.0%); graduation- and postgraduate-level students were nearly evenly split (50.3% vs. 49.7%). Most participants reported a CGPA of 3.00–4.00 (68.3%) and belonged to the middle socioeconomic class (55.0%). The sample was evenly divided between Muslim (50.0%) and non-Muslim (50.0%) students.

Table 1 *Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 300)*

Variable	Category	N	%
Age	18–21 years	93	31.0
	22–25 years	207	69.0
Gender	Female	98	32.7
	Male	202	67.3
Education level	Graduation	151	50.3
	Post-graduate	149	49.7
Family system	Joint	129	43.0
	Nuclear	171	57.0
Area of residence	Urban	144	48.0
	Rural	156	52.0
CGPA	1.00–1.99	21	7.0
	2.00–2.99	74	24.7
	3.00–4.00	205	68.3
Marital status	Single	248	82.7
	Married	52	17.3
Economic status	Lower	23	7.7
	Middle	165	55.0
	Upper	112	37.3
Religion	Muslim	150	50.0
	Non-Muslim	150	50.0

Tests of Normality

Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests indicated significant departures from normality for gratitude, resilience, emotional intelligence, and CGPA (all $p < .001$; Table 2), justifying the use of non-parametric statistics for all subsequent analyses.

Table 2 *Tests of Normality for Study Variables*

Variable	K-S Statistic	df	P	S-W Statistic	df	p
Gratitude	.181	300	<.001	.864	300	<.001
Emotional intelligence	.182	300	<.001	.842	300	<.001
Resilience	.190	300	<.001	.900	300	<.001
Academic performance (CGPA)	.184	300	<.001	.848	300	<.001

Note. K-S = Kolmogorov-Smirnov; S-W = Shapiro-Wilk. Significant values ($p < .05$) indicate a violation of the normality assumption.

Correlational Analysis

Spearman correlations (Table 3) showed that gratitude ($r = .533$, $p < .001$), resilience ($r = .503$, $p < .001$), and emotional intelligence ($r = .566$, $p < .001$) were each significantly and moderately-to-strongly associated with CGPA, supporting Objectives 1–3. Emotional intelligence and resilience were also strongly correlated with one another ($r = .807$, $p < .001$), indicating substantial overlap between these two constructs in this sample.

Table 3 *Spearman's rho Correlations among Gratitude, Resilience, Emotional Intelligence, and CGPA*

Variable 1	Variable 2	rs	p
Gratitude	CGPA	.533	<.001
Resilience	CGPA	.503	<.001
Emotional intelligence	CGPA	.566	<.001
Emotional intelligence	Resilience	.807	<.001

Differences by Religious Affiliation

Mann-Whitney U tests (Table 4) showed that Muslim students had significantly higher mean ranks than non-Muslim students on gratitude ($U = 6,722$, $Z = -3.61$, $p < .001$), emotional intelligence ($U = 5,552.5$, $Z = -5.33$, $p < .001$), and resilience ($U = 7,353$, $Z = -2.65$, $p = .008$). Muslim students also had significantly higher CGPA ranks than non-Muslim students ($U = 6,774$, $Z = -3.51$, $p < .001$), supporting H3 and partially supporting H1.

Table 4 *Mean Rank Comparisons of Gratitude, Emotional Intelligence, Resilience, and CGPA by Religious Affiliation*

Variable	Muslim MR	Non-Muslim MR	U	Z	p
Gratitude	161.73	122.08	6722.00	-3.606	<.001
Emotional intelligence	167.17	108.32	5552.50	-5.334	<.001
Resilience	158.80	129.51	7353.00	-2.653	.008

Academic performance (CGPA)	161.49	122.69	6774.00	-3.506	<.001
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Note. MR = mean rank. All comparisons used the Mann–Whitney U test.

Emotional Intelligence across CGPA Categories

A Kruskal–Wallis test showed a significant, graded increase in emotional intelligence mean ranks across CGPA categories (1.00–1.99: 66.40; 2.00–2.99: 109.47; 3.00–4.00: 173.92), $H(2) = 51.996$, $p < .001$, supporting H2 and Objective 3.

Group Differences by Demographic Variables

Age, education level, and family system were each associated with significant group differences in psychological variables (Table 5). Students aged 22–25 years showed significantly higher emotional intelligence ($Z = -5.32$, $p < .001$) and resilience ($Z = -7.11$, $p < .001$) than students aged 18–21, although the age difference in gratitude was not significant ($Z = -1.06$, $p = .291$), providing partial support for H5. Postgraduate students scored significantly higher than graduation-level students on emotional intelligence ($Z = -4.54$, $p < .001$) and resilience ($Z = -5.38$, $p < .001$), with a non-significant trend for gratitude ($p = .062$). Students from nuclear families reported higher emotional intelligence and resilience, whereas students from joint families reported higher gratitude (all $p < .001$). Socioeconomic status was significantly associated with emotional intelligence, $H(2) = 14.98$, $p = .001$, and resilience, $H(2) = 33.88$, $p < .001$, with the upper-income group scoring highest on both, but not with gratitude, $H(2) = 0.20$, $p = .907$, providing only partial support for H4. Gender differences were not significant for gratitude, emotional intelligence, or resilience.

Table 5 *Summary of Significant Group Differences by Demographic Variables*

Variable	Grouping factor	Test	Statistic	p
Gratitude	Age (18–21 vs. 22–25)	Mann–Whitney U	$Z = -1.057$	.291
Emotional intelligence	Age	Mann–Whitney U	$Z = -5.318$	<.001
Resilience	Age	Mann–Whitney U	$Z = -7.109$	<.001
Gratitude	Education level	Mann–Whitney U	$Z = -1.868$	.062
Emotional intelligence	Education level	Mann–Whitney U	$Z = -4.544$	<.001
Resilience	Education level	Mann–Whitney U	$Z = -5.378$	<.001
Gratitude	Family system	Mann–Whitney U	$Z = -5.388$	<.001
Emotional intelligence	Family system	Mann–Whitney U	$Z = -4.014$	<.001
Resilience	Family system	Mann–Whitney U	$Z = -3.993$	<.001
Gratitude	Economic status	Kruskal–Wallis H	$H(2) = 0.195$	.907
Emotional intelligence	Economic status	Kruskal–Wallis H	$H(2) = 14.977$	.001
Resilience	Economic status	Kruskal–Wallis H	$H(2) = 33.883$	<.001

Summary of the Results

Gratitude, resilience, and emotional intelligence were each significantly and positively correlated with academic performance, with emotional intelligence showing the strongest

association. Muslim students scored higher than non-Muslim students on all three psychological variables and on CGPA. Older and postgraduate students scored higher on emotional intelligence and resilience but not consistently on gratitude, and gratitude was higher among students from joint rather than nuclear families. Socioeconomic status was linked to emotional intelligence and resilience but not gratitude, and no significant gender differences emerged for any of the three psychological variables.

Discussion

Consistent with the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), gratitude was significantly and positively associated with academic performance, suggesting that grateful students may draw on broadened cognitive and behavioral repertoires, including sustained optimism and stronger relationships with peers and instructors, that support academic engagement. This finding parallels prior evidence that gratitude promotes academic engagement and satisfaction (Bono et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2021), and it may be reinforced in the Pakistani context by religiously grounded practices of gratitude (*shukr*) among Muslim students.

Resilience showed a comparable moderate positive association with CGPA, consistent with resilience theory's (Masten, 2001) emphasis on adaptive capacity under stress. Given that university life routinely exposes students to academic and personal setbacks, students able to recover from such challenges appear better positioned to sustain strong cumulative performance, echoing findings by Hartley (2022) and Souri and Hasanirad (2021) linking resilience to academic persistence.

Emotional intelligence showed the strongest association with CGPA among the three psychological variables, and CGPA categories showed a clear, graded increase in emotional intelligence, consistent with ability-based and social-cognitive models of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and with meta-analytic evidence that emotional intelligence reliably predicts academic achievement (MacCann et al., 2020; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2021). Students able to regulate emotion effectively may be better equipped to manage examination stress and maintain productive relationships with instructors and peers.

Age- and education-related differences, with older and postgraduate students scoring higher on emotional intelligence and resilience, are consistent with developmental accounts of emerging adulthood as a period of continued emotional maturation and identity consolidation (Arnett et al., 2020). That gratitude did not differ significantly by age or education level suggests that gratitude may develop somewhat independently of these developmental and educational trajectories, or may be shaped more strongly by family and cultural context, a possibility consistent with the finding that gratitude (but not emotional intelligence or resilience) was higher among students from joint rather than nuclear families.

Muslim students reported higher gratitude, resilience, and emotional intelligence, and higher CGPA, than non-Muslim students. While this pattern is consistent with the possibility that religiously grounded practices, such as *sabr* and *shukr*, support psychological adjustment and

academic discipline, religious affiliation in this study is confounded with unmeasured cultural, contextual, and support-system differences, and the present cross-sectional design cannot establish that religious affiliation itself, rather than associated social or contextual factors, accounts for the observed differences. Prior research on religious coping (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2021) suggests that shared meaning, self-control, and toughness associated with religiosity may function as one plausible, indirect pathway linking religious affiliation to academic outcomes, but this pathway was not directly tested here.

In summary, the present study supported the hypothesized positive relationships between gratitude, resilience, emotional intelligence, and academic performance, and found consistent group differences by religious affiliation, age, education level, and family system, but not by gender. These findings reinforce the view that academic performance reflects more than intellectual capability alone, and they extend positive-psychology and educational-psychology frameworks, largely developed in Western contexts, to a religiously diverse South Asian university population.

Implications

Theoretically, the findings extend positive psychology and educational psychology frameworks to a non-Western, religiously diverse setting, supporting the relevance of gratitude, resilience, and emotional intelligence to academic performance beyond the cultural contexts in which these constructs were originally developed. Practically, the results suggest that universities could incorporate emotional intelligence training, resilience-building programs, and gratitude-based interventions (e.g., reflective writing, mindfulness) into academic and counseling services, with particular attention to students in their earlier university years. At the policy level, the findings support integrating students' emotional and psychological development into institutional priorities, and at the cultural level, they suggest that such interventions are likely to be most effective when designed with sensitivity to students' religious and cultural frameworks for coping and emotional expression.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference regarding the direction of relationships among gratitude, resilience, emotional intelligence, and academic performance. Reliance on self-report measures, including self-reported CGPA, introduces potential social-desirability and recall biases. The convenience and snowball sampling strategy, drawn from Pakistani university students only, limits generalizability to other populations and may have overrepresented psychologically engaged respondents. The study did not control for potentially confounding variables such as intelligence, personality, study habits, or institutional quality, and CGPA alone does not capture the full range of students' academic abilities. Finally, the required use of non-parametric tests, while appropriate given non-normal data, limited statistical power and precluded more complex analyses such as mediation or

moderation modeling that could more directly test the proposed moderating role of religious affiliation.

Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to clarify the causal and temporal relationships among gratitude, resilience, emotional intelligence, and academic performance, and should formally test mediation and moderation models, particularly regarding the role of religious affiliation. Studies incorporating objective academic records, broader demographic and institutional controls, and more detailed measures of religious practice and cultural context would strengthen future work. In practice, universities are encouraged to integrate emotional-skills training, resilience-building, and gratitude-based interventions into curricula and counseling services, particularly for students in the earlier stages of their university careers.

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