

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A MEDIATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

**Maliha Nasir**

Department of Elementary Education,  
Institute of Education and Research,  
University of the Punjab,  
PAKISTAN.  
malihanasir@hotmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*This study was designed to examine the mediating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship of cultural adjustment of international students with their academic achievement. The sample consisted of 100 international students studying in different departments of International Islamic University Islamabad and National University of Modern Languages (NUML). Cultural Adjustment Scale (CAS) was used to measure the adjustment level of students. BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi) was used to measure emotional intelligence. The study posits emotional intelligence as a mediating variable in the relationship of cultural adjustment and academic achievement as it was assumed to be correlated with both variables. The relationship among the variables was examined through correlation analysis. A significant correlation was found among the three variables. The mediating effect of emotional intelligence was confirmed through partial correlation.*

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Cultural Adjustment, Mediating Effect, Academic Achievement

### INTRODUCTION

The vast expansion of communication technology and the rapid increase in world travel have reduced the distances in various cultures and societies changing the world in a global village. Thus, the trend of international exchange of students and scholars is increasing in order to share the best intellectual resources from different parts of the world. Such exchange of intellectuals brings different cultures close to one another and develops respect and understanding for values of different cultures. International students are an important part of higher education institutions in the world. In Pakistan a significant number of international students is enrolled in various disciplines of different universities. These students, having different cultural backgrounds, face many adjustment problems during their stay in a new academic and social environment. The level of successful adjustment of international student to the new culture can affect their academic performance.

Cultural adjustment involves the process of understanding and incorporating behaviours, values and beliefs of the host culture in the perspective of one's own culture of origin (Constantine *et al.*, 2004). Kagan and Cohen (1990) have defined cultural adjustment in terms of a process that involves several interrelated factors associated with behavioural, cognitive, affective and demographic aspects and that results in different levels of adjustment from cultural assimilation to cultural transmutation.

Being culturally different from their hosts, international students have their own values, beliefs, patterns of thinking and ways of learning. These differences in the cultural aspects of international students and their host society may cause problems of interaction between the two groups. During the process of adjustment to a foreign culture international students may experience some emotional problems such as anxiety, ambiguity, depression, home sickness, etc.

According to Matsumoto *et al.* (2005) psychological processes play an important role in intercultural adjustment process. Intercultural adjustment does not only require the knowledge of host culture or proficiency in language skills, rather the abilities to regulate emotions, think critically, being open-

mindful and flexible to accept changes in one's customary way of life are more important for successful adjustment in a new culture. They described these attributes as 'Psychological Engine' of adjustment that helps in using knowledge and language for integrating with people of different cultures.

As the process of cultural adjustment involves emotional processing, the difficulties in the adjustment process can be overcome with the help of emotional competencies. Emotional intelligence can play an important role in the process of cultural adjustment. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence in terms of abilities to understand one's own and others emotions and to use this information for guiding thoughts and actions. Afterward the concept of emotional intelligence was defined and explained by different scholars in terms of models consisting of various emotional skills. However, according to Goleman (2000) the basic concepts in these models are much common.

Theoretically, emotional intelligence denotes an assortment of skills related to self-discipline, determination, self-motivation and sensitivity to the feelings of others. BarOn (2006) defines emotional intelligence in terms of such emotional and social skills that influence our understanding and expression of ourselves, our understanding for others and interaction with them, and the ability to deal with everyday demands.

Research has been conducted to see the relationship of emotional intelligence with various aspects of life that indicated relationship of emotional intelligence with success in the fields of education, work, health, adjustment, etc. Various research studies have revealed a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement (e.g. Low & Nelson, 2004; Márquez *et al.*, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2007; Holt, 2008; Nasir & Masrur, 2010; etc). Different studies have revealed relationship of emotional intelligence with life adjustment (Chen, *et al.* 2006), social adjustment (Engelberg & Sjoberg, 2004), academic adjustment (Adeyemo, 2006), psychosocial adjustment (Kerr *et al.*, 2004) and cultural adjustment (Gabel *et al.*, 2005).

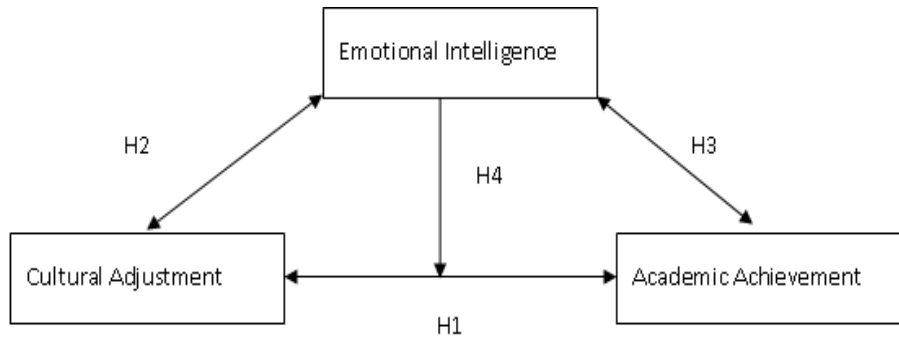
The research conducted on students' adjustment problems has indicated a relationship between adjustment and academic success. The study conducted by Chen *et al.* (1997) has revealed that students' adjustment to social environment contributes to their academic achievement. Reynolds and Constantine (2007) found a relationship between cultural adjustment difficulties of college students and their career development outcomes.

The research reveals that both emotional intelligence and cultural adjustment are related to academic achievement; and the research literature also suggests that the process of cultural adjustment involves emotional experiences; therefore, we can say that emotional intelligence may have a mediating effect on the relationship of cultural adjustment and academic achievement. For confirming the mediating effect of a variable, following conditions must be satisfied (Li & Gasser, 2005; Donohue & Steverson, 2006; Blankson, 2008):

1. The first condition of mediation is that the independent variable or predictor must be significantly correlated with the dependent variable or criterion.
2. The second condition is that predictor variable must be significantly correlated with presumed mediating variable.
3. The third condition is that mediating variable is significantly correlated with dependent variable or criterion.
4. The fourth condition is that when mediating variable is controlled, the coefficient of correlation between predictor and criterion variables is reduced.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the light of the above points, this study was designed to examine the mediating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship of cultural adjustment and academic achievement. The study intended to examine the correlation among the variables and to find out whether emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between cultural adjustment and academic achievement. The conceptual framework of the study is given in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Four hypotheses were formulated for the study.

- H1. There is a significant correlation between cultural adjustment and academic achievement.
- H2. There is a significant correlation between cultural adjustment and emotional intelligence.
- H3. There is a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement.
- H4. Emotional intelligence mediates the relationship of cultural adjustment and academic achievement.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted on a sample of 100 randomly selected international students studying in various departments of International Islamic University Islamabad and National University of Modern Languages (NUML). The sample comprised 58 female students and 42 male students with the age range 19-30 years. Their mean age was 22 years ( $SD = 3.92$ ).

The adjustment level of students was measured through Cultural Adjustment Scale (Nasir, 2011). The scale consists of 22 items and measures three dimensions of cultural adjustment: General adjustment, Socio-cultural adjustment and Work adjustment. Emotional intelligence of students was measured through BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi) which is a standardized tool to measure various constructs of emotional intelligence. A validated version of the inventory developed by Aslam (2004) was used with the permission of National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad. Academic achievement of the students was taken in terms of Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of the students.

For data collection 120 foreign students were personally contacted; however, 100 students agreed to participate in the study. They were given the research instruments in their free time and they were briefed about how to rate the responses of the scales.

Pearson Product Moment coefficient of correlation was calculated to find the correlation among the variables and the mediating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship of cultural adjustment and academic achievement was examined through partial correlation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Correlation analysis revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between international students' CGPA and cultural adjustment ( $r = .29$ ,  $P < .01$ ). Emotional intelligence was also significantly correlated with cultural adjustment ( $r = .59$ ,  $P < .01$ ) and academic achievement ( $r = .36$ ,  $P < .01$ ). Table 1 shows the coefficients of correlation among the three variables.

For examining the mediating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship of cultural adjustment and academic achievement, partial correlation was found between cultural adjustment and academic achievement controlling for emotional intelligence. The coefficient of correlation between cultural adjustment and CGPA was reduced from .29 (Table 1) to .04 (Table 2). The correlation between academic achievement and cultural adjustment turned out to be insignificant.

**Table 1. Coefficients of Correlation among the variables (N= 100).**

	CGPA	EQi	CAS
CGPA	-		
EQi	.36**	-	
CAS	.29**	.59**	-

**Table 2. Partial Correlation between and Academic Achievement and Cultural Adjustment Controlling for Emotional Intelligence. (N= 100)**

Controlled Variable	CAS	CGPA
EQi	-	-
	CGPA	.04

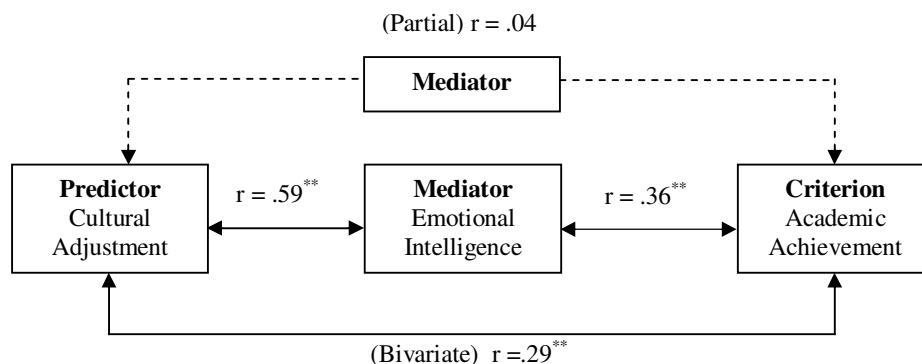
These results show that emotional intelligence has a strong mediating effect on the relationship of cultural adjustment and academic achievement.

The results of this study provided ample evidence to support the hypotheses of the study. A significant correlation between cultural adjustment and academic achievement shows that cultural adjustment of the international students plays an important role in their academic performance. This result is in agreement with the former studies that revealed a positive correlation between cultural adjustment and academic achievement of international students (Nasir, 2011).

Cultural adjustment was also found to be significantly correlated with emotional intelligence. This finding is in line with the outcomes of the study of Gabel, Dolen and Cerdin (2005) who found significant correlation of cross-cultural adjustment with some aspects of emotional intelligence.

A significant correlation was found between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. This finding is in agreement with former research (Low & Nelson, 2004; Marquez, Martin & Brackett, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2007; Holt, 2008; Nasir & Masrur, 2010).

Further analysis also confirmed that emotional intelligence has mediating effect on the relationship between cultural adjustment and academic achievement. Figure 2 shows the graphical representation of mediating effect of emotional intelligence in the relationship between cultural adjustment and academic achievement of international students.



**Figure 2. Mediating effect of emotional intelligence in the relationship of cultural adjustment and academic achievement.**

All the four conditions for confirming the mediating effect were satisfied:

1. The first condition of mediation was satisfied as the predictor variable, i.e., cultural adjustment was significantly correlated to criterion variable— academic achievement.
2. The second condition was satisfied as the predictor variable, i.e., cultural adjustment was significantly correlated with emotional intelligence that was a presumed mediating factor.

3. The third condition was satisfied as the presumed mediating variable, i.e. emotional intelligence, was significantly correlated with the criterion variable, i.e. academic achievement.
4. The result of this study showed that the fourth condition was also satisfied. When emotional intelligence was kept constant, the coefficient of correlation between cultural adjustment and academic achievement was reduced (Table 2).

Matsumoto et al. (2005) emphasized the importance of emotional skills like emotional regulation, openness and flexibility for intercultural adjustment process. As emotional responses are involved in the process of cultural adjustment, emotional intelligence may be helpful in overcoming the difficulties in the adjustment process. International students with better Intrapersonal skills can overcome the difficulties in the process of adjustment through the understanding of their strength and capabilities. Adjustment process can be smoothed by the means of better interpersonal relationships and understanding of others viewpoint.

A person having stress management skills can overtake frustration and manage his/her emotional reactions while dealing with difficulties. Adaptability skills enable the individuals to adjust to a new cultural environment. The process of adjustment can also be affected by the general mood of a person.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, we can conclude from the study that emotional intelligence has a mediating effect on the relationship of cultural adjustment and academic achievement of international students. Emotional abilities help international students deal with difficulties in the process of adjustment to a new environment and make adjustment process easier, thereby, improve their academic performance. Educational institutions may arrange some programs of training in emotional skills for international students so that the adjustment process may be facilitated.

## REFERENCES

- Adeyemo, D.A. (2006). The buffering effect of emotional intelligence on the adjustment of secondary school students in transition. *E. J. Research in Educational Psychology*. 6-3 (2): 79-90
- Aslam, F. (2004). *Relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress among Informational Technology Professionals*. Unpublished thesis. National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.
- Bar-On, R. (2006). The Bar-On Model of Emotional-Social Intelligence (ESI). *Psicothema*. supl.18: pp. 13-25.
- Blankson, A. N. (2008). *Mediation and moderated mediation using SPSS*. QTUG Conference August 11, 2008, Retrieved from [http://qtug.smep.googlepages.com/Blankson\\_QTUG\\_8-11-08b.ppt#348,3,Mediation](http://qtug.smep.googlepages.com/Blankson_QTUG_8-11-08b.ppt#348,3,Mediation)
- Chen, F. S., et al. (2006). A study of the emotional intelligence and life adjustment of senior high school students. *World Transactions on Engineering and Technology Education*. 5 (3): 473-476
- Chen, X., et al. (1997). Relation between academic achievement and social adjustment: Evidence from Chinese children. *Developmental Psychology*. 33 (3): 518-525.
- Constantine, M.G., et al. (2004). Self-concealment, social efficacy, acculturative stress and depression in African, Asian and Latin America international college students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 74 (3): 230-241.
- Donohue, R. and Stevensen, L. (2006). The relationship between emotional intelligence and individual advancement and the mediating role of transformational leadership. *Monash Business Review*. 2 (2). Retrieved May 11, 2009, from

- <http://www.buseco.monash.edu.au/research/mbr/2008/monash-university-mbr-iq-or-eq-%5Bfulltext%5D.pdf>
- Engelberg, E. and Sjoberg, L. (2004). Emotional Intelligence, Affect Intensity and Social Adjustment, *Personality and Individual Differences*. 37(3): 533-542
- Gabel, R. S., et al. (2005). Emotional Intelligence as predictor of cultural adjustments for success in global assignments. *Career Development International*. 10 (5): 375-395.
- Goleman, D. (2001). *Emotional intelligence: Issues in paradigm building*. Pages 13-26 in *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace*. Goleman, D. and Cherniss, C. (eds.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Holt, S.S. (2008). *Emotional Intelligence and academic achievement in higher education*. Paper presented at *Higher Education Symposium on Emotional Intelligence*. Georgetown University. October 2-3, 2008. Retrieved June 3, 2010 from <http://downloads.mhs.com/hesei/2008/SvetlanaHolt.ppt>
- Jaeger A.J. and Eagan M.K. (2007). Exploring the value of emotional intelligence: A means to improve academic performance. *NASPA Journal*. 44 (3): 512-537
- Kagan, H. and Cohen, J. (1990). Cultural adjustment of international students. *Psychological Science*. 1(2), pp.133-137
- Kerr, S., et al. (2004). Predicting adjustment during the transition to college: Alexithymia, perceived stress, and psychological symptoms. *Journal of College Student Development*. 45 (6): 593-611
- Li, A. and Gasser, M.B. (2005). Predicting Asian international students' socio-cultural adjustment: A test of two mediation models, *Intl. J. of Intercultural Relations*. 29 (5): 561-576
- Low, G.R. and Nelson, D.B. (2004). Emotional intelligence: Effectively bridging the gap from high school to college, *TAXAS STUDY Mag. for Sec. Edu*. 13(2): 7-10
- Márquez P.G., et al. (2006). Relating emotional intelligence to social competence and academic achievement in high school students. *Psicothema, supl*. 18: 118-123
- Matsumoto, D., et al. (2005). Emotion and intercultural communication. *Kwansei Gakuin University Journal*. 99: 15-38.
- Nasir, M. and Masrur, R. (2010). An exploration of emotional intelligence of the students of IIUI in relation to gender, age and academic achievement. *Bulletin of Education and Research*. 32 (1): 37-51
- Nasir, M. (2011). Correlation of Emotional Intelligence with Demographic Characteristics, *Academic Achievement and Cultural Adjustment of the Students of IIUI*. Unpublished Doctorate Thesis. International Islamic University Islamabad
- Reynolds, A.L. and Constantine, M.G. (2007). Cultural adjustment difficulties and career development of international college students. *Journal of Career Assessment*. 15 (3): 338-350
- Salovey, P. and Mayer, J.D. (1990) .Emotional Intelligence, *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*. 9 (3): 185-211