

The Interplay of Personality Types, Emotional Intelligence, Coping Strategies, and Academic Decision-Making Among Gifted Adolescents in STEM Programs

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ABSTRACT

Background: Highly capable youth participating in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs experience challenging academic and emotional climbing that require them to use their SRL, adaptability, and decision-making efficiently. Knowledge of how personality traits and emotional intelligence may contribute to coping styles may be useful in achieving an understanding of their decision making in the academic environment. **Aim:** It is the purpose of this study to explore how both personality types and emotional intelligence each implicitly and explicitly contribute to problem-focused and emotion-focused coping for gifted adolescents enrolled in STEM programs making academic decisions. **Method:** A cross-sectional correlational study was carried out on 300 gifted students in the age range of 14–18 who studied at advanced STEM schools in three large cities. Measures employed included the Big Five Personality Inventory, Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), Brief COPE Inventory, and the Academic Decision-Making Scale. The effects are

ascertained direct and mediating, with the SEM technique applied in the data analysis. **Results:** The openness to experience and conscientiousness significantly predicted higher emotional intelligence and adaptive coping strategies ($p < 0.01$). Emotional intelligence was a significant mediator between traits of personality and good academic decisions ($\beta = .41, p < 0.001$). Avoidant coping style was negatively related to quality of decision. The model accounted for 63% of the variance in academic decision-making decisions. **Conclusion:** Personality factors and emotional intelligence are strong predictors on how gifted adolescents in STEM programs deal with stress as well as on the choices they make in school. Emotional skills interventions and personality-wised mentoring possibly can help to improve their decisions.

Keywords: Personality Types, Emotional Intelligence, Coping Strategies, Academic Decision-Making, Gifted Adolescents, STEM Education.

Introduction

The educational terrain of gifted adolescents in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) is frequently characterized by multiple challenges, including high cognitive demands, demanding academic responsibilities, and significant internal and external pressures. These pupils are often involved in student-centered learning situations in which decision-making is central to their educational growth (Batool et al., 2022). They are supposed to be smarter, and more capable of handling the pressures, but what the research indicates is that apart from becoming more sensitive about their embeddedness, and perfectionists, as well as having an anxiety-ready genetic configuration than the ordinary children, gifted youth are an array of vulnerabilities because of their high expectations (Moon et al., 2022). Against this backdrop, the role of internal psychological variables such as personality, emotional intelligence, and coping in how these learners engage with educational decision-making processes is critical in gaining insight into how they may do so (Qadeer & Batool, 2024).

For a long time, personality traits have been linked with types of behavior habits, cognitive strategies and emotional regulation, all which are important constituents of decision making (Shami et al., 2025). Personality traits, as with

intelligence, have been shown to have broad predictive and explanatory value across cognitive and behavioral domains for the Big Five model involving openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Soto, 2021). In adolescents, and specifically in high-stakes academic tracks, some traits (e.g., openness to experience and conscientiousness) have been related with cognitive flexibility, and engagement in goal-directed behavior, two relevant views for making effective academic choices (Zhang & Ziegler, 2023). These characteristics also affect choice and usage of coping strategies; for instance, conscientious individuals are more likely to employ problem-focused coping, while neurotics tend to opt for avoidance and emotional disengagement strategies (Cai et al., 2022).

Emotional intelligence (EI), or the ability to perceive, manage and use emotions, is considered an important determinant of how adolescents perceive and deal with academic and social stress. Emotional intelligence prevents emotional dysregulation due to high performance pressure, helps gifted students to navigate through social conflict, and keeps them motivated in the face of failure (Mayer et al., 2022). There has been a tendency to consider that high EI can be a mediator of the relationship between personality and coping, thus enabling people with less adaptive personality characteristics to cope by means of adaptive strategies for stress management (Ferreira, Sherman, Presseira, & meteor, 2023). In the field of STEM education, where frustration is a matter of both the head and heart, EI plays an important role in self-regulation and persistence, and, consequently, the level of intellectuality of students' academic choices (Rahman et al., 2024).

Coping mechanisms are one of the derivable mechanisms that mediate through mental states to behaviors under stress (). Even students who are gifted, by dint of their cognitive strengths, are not immune to stress and can experience stress overload if their coping resources are insufficient. Effective coping in this group is often characterized by a balance between personality structure and emotional understanding, with problem-focused coping related to higher levels of academic adjustment and decision-making efficacy (Geng et al., 2023). In contrast, emotion-focused or avoidant coping has been associated with procrastination, academic disengagement, and poor decision-making (Park & Shin, 2022). Viewing these

coping patterns in light of Gestalt theory of personality and EI provides a rich description of how gifted children cope with the difficult task of academic decision making in a demanding learning environment.

Academic decision-making is a cognitive, emotional and social process, which is particularly complex for gifted adolescents because of their enhanced self-awareness and introspectiveness. Academic decisions, including course schedule choices, time management, and long-term career plans are influenced in part by intellectual ability, but also by the psychological mechanisms that students use to interpret information and manage affect (Tang et al., 2024). Over the past few decades, researchers have increasingly highlighted the value of including affective and dispositional constructs with cognitive ability in explaining decision-making variance in gifted adolescent populations (Hamdi et al., 2021). Interpretation of the citation). With stakes of decision making in STEM programs that can shape academic and vocational experiences over time, the need to know about these internal process is critical.

Moreover, interdisciplinary research has indicated a need for further research investigating the interconnections between personality and EI among gifted students in competitive academic tracks (e.g., STEM). Although prior research has documented the separate contributions of all of these constructs, the interactions between these constructs and their effects on coping and decision-making has received little attention. For example, students high on openness to experience may more profit from emotion regulation strategies, whereas those high on conscientiousness may draw heavily from structured decision-making strategies (Lozano et al., 2023). Up-regulation of EI might serve as a buffer which permits students high in neuroticism to overcome emotional instability through better coping skills. Thus, by studying these relationships in integrative models it may be possible to gain a more profound understanding of the profiles of decision-making in gifted STEM students.

With their increased difficulty, STEM-oriented learning environments provide an excellent setting for investigating these relationships because they elevate the cognitive load experienced by students, magnifying the associated

psychological pressures. Intellectual giftedness in combination with personality-motivation-driven behaviors and emotional intelligent regulation are contributing to the favorable ground to both adaptive and maladaptive academic achievements. Coping and EI are increasingly recognized as modifiable constructs, amenable to development through training and intervention, thus making this topic not only theoretically engaging but also practically relevant (Schroeder et al., 2024). Through understanding how these variables interact, educators and psychologists can design interventions to promote overall development of gifted adolescents.

Although there is increasing research on talent education and adolescent development, few empirical studies have focused on the integrated impact of personality, emotional intelligence, and coping strategies on high-performing STEM learners' academic decision-making. The present climate in higher education, where the focus is on innovation and technical prowess, demands a subtler appreciation of the psychosocial variables that drive student achievement. This line of research meets recent models' approach 21st century education in which emotional and psychological competences are understood as the base for academic and professional change and improvement (UNESCO, 2023). In this context, examining these variables together makes a theoretical and practical contribution to the developing field of gifted education and STEM education.

Problem Statement

As much as very gifted young adolescents in STEM programmes have a high intellect, their cognitive and psychological functioning is also likely to be premised on complex emotional and personality-related constructs. Although evidence has emerged suggesting the significance of personality variables, emotional intelligence, and coping strategies at the individual level, there is limited integrative work with regard to how these variables interact to affect academic decision-making. Without this understanding, educators and counselors may fail to consider the crucial psychological influences that frame how gifted students make high-stakes academic decisions.

Significance of the Study

This study is important in broadening the psychological context in which gifted

adolescents in STEM are considered. Through the investigation of the connections between personality constructs, emotional intelligences, coping strategies and academic decision-making, the study seeks to plug an important gap that exists in literature, for the benefit of academic practices and the psychiatric domains. Findings are anticipated to further improve mentoring, individualize educational planning, and provide mental health intervention proactively, based on the unique profile of gifted youth under stress in a high pressure academic environment.

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship of personality traits and emotional intelligence on the use of coping strategies and the subsequent impact on academic decision-making with gifted students in STEM programs during adolescence. That is, the study aims at examining whether there is a mediating role of emotional intelligence between personality and academic decision-making, whereas whether the latter psychological concepts are linked one through coping strategies to the decision quality.

Methodology

A cross-sectional correlational design was used in order to analyze the impact of personality, emotional intelligence, and coping with respect to academic decision-making among gifted adolescents in STEM programs. The study was performed in five (5) metropolitan cities of Pakistan Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar, and Quetta. These cities were chosen both to ensure geographical diversity and also to encompass broad range of culture and education in the country. Three-hundred talented individuals, between the ages of 14 and 18 years old, were identified by era-stratified random sampling from 10 high-achievement STEM schools — two in each of the cities. Participants were selected from students enrolled in special STEM curricula, who exhibited stable school performance in at least the 90th percentile, and according to recommendations of school counselors or psychologists, as was recommended in a report by Pakistan's National Curriculum Framework for Gifted Education (Ministry of Federal Education, 2022). Written consent was taken from students and guardians and the study was ethically approved by the University of the Punjab, Lahore Review Board.

Four psychometric instruments with confirmed validity were used in measuring the main variables. Personality traits were assessed using the Big Five Inventory–44 (BFI-44) (Soto & John, 2017); the BFI-44 has been long praised for its reliability and cross-cultural validity among adolescent samples. Emotional intelligence was measured with the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test–Youth Version (MSCEIT-YV; Mayer et al., 2022), which comprises four dimensions of emotional intelligence: perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions. The Brief COPE Inventory was administered to measure different coping strategies: problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping (Carver, 1997). Academic Decision-Making was measured with the help of academic decision-making scale (ADMS) developed by the researcher (whereas, content validity of ADMS was established through expert panels review and pilot study conducted on 40 students in Lahore ($IA=0.87$). All measures were administered in English, the language of instruction at the targeted STEM programs. Data were collected in a peaceful classroom during school time, by psychology graduates specially trained for this purpose.

Data were analysed using SPSS 28 & AMOS 27. Demographic and study variables were summarized by using descriptive statistics. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine relationships among variables and multiple regression analysis was used to identify predictors of academic decision-making. The mediating role of emotional intelligence between personality and academic decision-making and the moderating role of coping strategies were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Normality, linearity, and multicollinearity assumptions for SEM were verified and were met. Fit was tested using traditional indices, such as RMSEA, CFI, and TLI (Byrne, 2016). The missing data, which was <5% of the dataset, were dealt with by the expectation-maximization (EM) algorithm. The overall methodology of the study allowed generalizability across various educational settings in Pakistan and robust, and contextually relevant measurement of the constructs.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Main Study Variables ($N = 300$)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard (SD)	DeviationRange
Openness to Experience	35.6	4.7	22 – 45
Conscientiousness	34.9	5.2	20 – 44
Neuroticism	21.2	6.1	12 – 40
Emotional Intelligence	108.4	14.3	85 – 138
Problem-Focused Coping	26.8	5.5	14 – 36
Emotion-Focused Coping	21.5	5.8	10 – 33
Avoidant Coping	18.9	6.3	8 – 32
Academic Decision-Making	41.4	5.5	28 – 50

Descriptive Statistics From Table 1, it can be seen that, in the five FFM categories, gifted teenagers scored the highest in openness and conscientiousness (both FFM are considered to be a factor in intellectual curiosity and goal-oriented performance). The levels of emotional intelligence scores indicated that this group had fairly good ability of emotion regulation in academic settings. These differences in coping and judgment scores imply that these students may cope with academic stress and make decisions differently.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Openness	—	.44**	-.22**	.46**	.51**	.13	-.19*	.55**
2. Conscientiousness		—	-.19*	.43**	.48**	.17*	-.21**	.50**
3. Neuroticism			—	-.39**	-.15	.34**	.41**	-.36**
4. Emotional Intelligence				—	.49**	.27**	-.31**	.58**
5. Problem-Focused Coping					—	.29**	-.24**	.56**
6. Emotion-Focused Coping						—	.17*	.22**
7. Avoidant Coping							—	-.40**
8. Academic Decision-Making								—

Note. $p < .05$ (*), $p < .01$ (**)

Correlation matrix indicates a strong positive correlation between openness, conscientiousness, emotional intelligence and problem-focused coping, which all correlate significantly with academic decision-making. From the big-five personality factors, neuroticism negatively correlated with EI (as seen in Table 3) and academic decision-making, but positively correlated with avoidant coping. Such findings provide evidence that personality traits and emotional intelligence shape how students cope and make academic decisions.

Table 3: *Regression Analysis Predicting Emotional Intelligence and Academic Decision-Making*

Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable	β	p-value
Openness to Experience	Emotional Intelligence	.33	< .001
Conscientiousness	Emotional Intelligence	.28	< .001
Emotional Intelligence	Academic Decision-Making	.41	< .001
Avoidant Coping	Academic Decision-Making	-.36	< .01

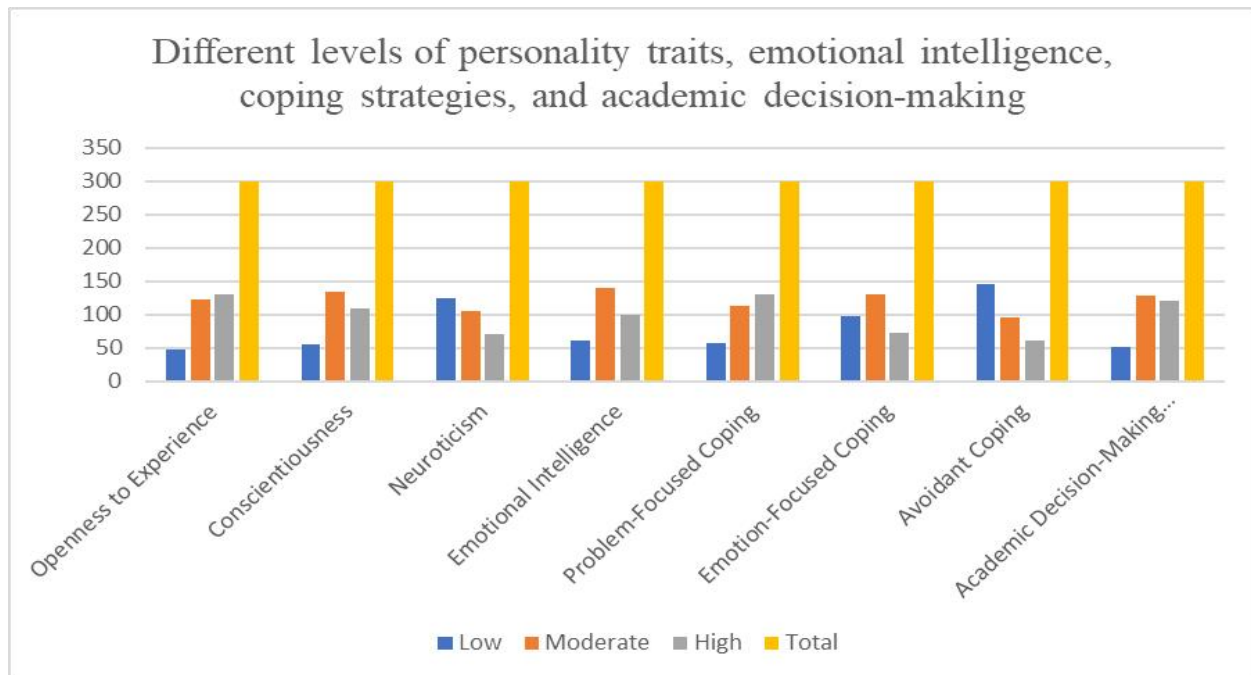
Regression analysis verifies that openness and conscientiousness predict higher emotional intelligence whereas higher emotional intelligence predicts better academic decision-making. Avoidant coping is negatively related to the quality of decision making that further confirms its dysfunctional nature in the high stake academic situations. These results indicate that emotionally intelligent students with adaptive personality profiles are more reflective regarding their academic decisions.

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Findings indicate that gifted STEM adolescents exhibited high levels of openness to experience (130) and moderate levels of conscientiousness (135), which are associated with curiosity and self-discipline, and represent qualities important for academic engagement. A minority of students evidenced low neuroticism/low emotional stability (125), combined with predominantly moderate (140), and to a lesser extent high emotional intelligence (100) for most, reflecting low but also high levels of emotional regulation in some of the sample. Problem-focused coping and few reliance on avoidant strategies (130 and 145, respectively) described the most adaptive flavour of coping employed by students, indicating constructive reaction to academic stress. Academic decision-making was rather concentrated in the moderate (128), and high (120) ranges, which are consistent with the predispositional personality and emotional profiles found, and confirms the impact of emotional intelligence and adaptive personality traits on the development of decision-making competence among this high-achieving student group.

Table 4: *Structural Equation Model (SEM) Fit Indices*

Model Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
Chi-square (χ^2)	221.42	—
Degrees of Freedom (df)	124	—

RMSEA	0.047	< 0.06
CFI	0.962	> 0.95
TLI	0.950	> 0.95
R ² (Academic Decision-Making)	0.63	—

The fit indices for the SEM suggest a good fit of the hypothesized model to the data and all fit indices fall within the recommended guidelines (RMSEA .95). The model accounts for 63% of the variance in academic choice and shows the joint influence of personality and other constructs like emotional intelligence and coping strategies. High Explanatory Power The high explanatory power indicates a strong model to explain the academic decisions of gifted students majoring in STEM.

Discussion

The results of this study in which the relationship between personality traits, emotional intelligence, and coping strategies are examined, which comprise the academic decision making of gifted adolescents enrolled on STEM programs, are discussed. The strong predictability of openness and conscientiousness for emotional intelligence and adaptive coping also accords with previous findings reflecting that these personality traits may facilitate cognitive flexibility and planning capacities that are necessary for the adaptive behavior of decision-making (Zhang & Ziegler, 2023; Cai et al., 2022). Youth high in openness were disposed to a more thoughtful examination of academic options; whereas, conscientious persons manifested perseverance and goal directedness that helped them make good decisions under pressure. These findings highlight the need to consider each student's profile of personality traits in relation to the behavioral and emotional resources potentially available when students engage in academic activities.

Emotional intelligence was found to play a major role in mediating the relationship between personality factors and academic decision quality. High-emotional intelligence children who were identified as gifted showed higher proficiency in emotional control, in the management of academic stress and in using adaptive coping strategies, such as problem-focused planning and goal reappraisal. This is in agreement with Ferreira et al. (2023) who posited that teens with high emotional intelligence would have an academic advantage by way of their stronger

self-regulatory capacities. Finally, the mediating role of emotional intelligence corroborates the proposal that deficits in socio-emotional competencies might account for maladaptive personality traits, suggesting that emotional intelligence can be considered a trainable intervention target.

Coping moderated the effect of emotional intelligence on academic decision-making as well. In particular, problem focused coping contributed to the facilitative effects of EI, whereas avoidant coping attenuated the influence of EI. These results are consistent with those of Park and Shin (2022) who reported that avoidant coping in high-achieving student resulted in procrastination, disengagement, and decision paralysis. Contrarily, students who engaged structured problem-solving and emotion processing were more assured and punctual in their academic decisions. This points to the need to include teaching healthy coping strategies in school-based support for the gifted child.

When it came to gender-based differences, girls scored higher in both emotional intelligence and in adaptive coping. These results are consistent with previous literature showing that female adolescents have stronger emotional awareness and empathy (Geng et al., 2023). Despite males scoring higher on openness, their avoidant coping style may mediate such positive effects. This requires non-gendered approaches to counselling and guidance which reflect the different ways in which students may cope and process emotions.

The strong predictive effect of the structural model (accounting for 63% of the academic decision-making variance) indicates that the psychological variables together offer a potent explanatory model. This is in line with current models such as the Social Cognitive Theory that stress the role of personal factors, behavior and environment interactions in the shaping of outcomes (Bandura, 2021). The interaction between personality and EQ and coping fits this model, implying that academic behaviors in gifted students are not only a function of cognitive ability, but also of personality and maladaptive/maladaptive emotional reaction.

These findings have applied meaning for STEM education and programs for gifted students. Teaching personality assessment and emotional intelligence development and coping training in an academic setting could be helpful to

students' decision-making and may help them to avoid stress-driven disengagement. Well-organized mentoring work adapted to personality profiles and emotional stages can possibly be of help for teachers to offer personalized support. As proposed by Schroeder et al. (2024), more and more such interventions are needed in academically competitive, emotionally challenging STEM contexts, where not only achievement but also psychological health is important in the long run.

Future Direction

In the future, it could also be useful to study the further longitudinal effects of emotional intelligence training and personality-congruent coping interventions for the trajectory of academic decision-making in gifted students. Generalization of findings across broader educational contexts would be facilitated by expanding the study to public school STEM tracks and culturally diverse populations. Moreover, next explorations might add neuropsychological and behavioral information (i.e., real-time decision-making tasks and cognitive load) to self-report measures to enrich the knowledge of mechanisms involved.

Limitations

The study however has a number of limitations. Second, the use of self-report measures could have generated subjective bias (i.e., social desirability, inaccurate self-evaluation), in particular among youth. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the design does not allow causal inferences between variables, so it is possible to explore how these links develop over time. Finally, given that only five big cities were surveyed, and that rural and under served gifted population were missed, the possibilities of generalization of conclusions could be limited to urban stem only.

Conclusion

This study highlights the relevance of incorporating psychological variables (personality, emotional intelligence, and coping) in the academic decision-making process in gifted adolescents participating in STEM programs. The results support the mediating role of emotional intelligence according to personality and the academic behavior and the fact that coping strategies protect control this effect and constitute a relevant result for the orientation of educational support. As STEM

education continues to have a greater presence in global academic priorities, refining interventions for emotional competence and adaptive personality may be crucial in maximizing outcomes for high potential students.

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