

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, ATTITUDE TOWARD CHRISTIANITY, AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN RELIGION AND CIVIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) and academic performance have been studied for decades. EI is the ability to manage one's emotions and influence those of others. Academic performance includes marks and grades. Research suggests that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in shaping students' educational outcomes. In this cross-sectional study, we explore a new aspect of the equation by analyzing the connection between attitude towards Christianity and the two factors mentioned earlier - emotional intelligence and academic performance in rural and urban areas. The research aimed to investigate the relationship between three variables in the religious education system. The study included 252 students from nine Adventist primary schools in Romania, in grades 3 and 4, aged 9-12 years. There is a strong positive correlation between academic performance and emotional intelligence and Attitude toward Christianity in Civics ($r = .166$; $p = .008$; $r = .173$; $p = .006$), as well as a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and attitudes toward Christianity ($r = .370$, $DF = 250$, $p < .001$). The evidence suggests that the significant relationship between emotional intelligence and attitudes toward Christianity indicates that religious beliefs may play a role in emotional well-being and academic success. There are notable differences in educational achievements among rural areas and urban areas in Civics ($t = 3,4834$, $p = .001$) and Religion ($t = 2,9509$, $p = .004$),

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emphasizing the need for tailored interventions and support systems to address the unique challenges rural students face. To promote academic success and inclusive learning environments, it's crucial to address the interplay between emotional intelligence, religious attitudes, and rural educational settings.

Keywords

Emotional intelligence, attitudes towards Christianity, academic performance, rural environment, primary education, religion education, civic education

INTRODUCTION

The article explores the topic of academic performance and examines the different factors that affect it. Recent studies have found that academic performance is influenced by mental health, family relationships, economic situation, age, peer relationships, course repetition, self-efficacy, self-control, emotions, and involvement (Guerrero-López et al., 2020). In addition, factors such as students' motivation, academic staff responsibilities, course design and content, perceived usefulness, ease of use, and academic orientation (Moesarofah et al., 2023) also play a significant role in determining academic performance. A student's academic performance is influenced by various factors, including their internal and external educational environment, as highlighted by Kamara and Dadhabai (2022). Besides, a student's mental health, employment status, study duration, time spent on electronic devices, and other variables can also impact their academic performance, as Wan Abdul Razak et al. (2021) noted.

The specific objective of this study is to discover whether emotional intelligence and attitude toward God also influence academic performance. As evidence to support the research goal, recent studies have found a positive and statistically significant correlation between emotional intelligence and students' academic performance (Usán Supervía & Salavera Bordás, 2019). Additionally, it has been identified as a significant

predictor of academic level (Bukhari & Khanam, 2016). On the other hand, research has found that religiosity significantly influences the academic performance of students (Padua Rodríguez, 2019; Sta. Maria, 2018).

This study is based on empirical research and seeks to explore how certain variables may impact academic performance. We aim to investigate how these predictors of academic achievement apply to students in Religion and Civic education particularly in the 3rd and 4th-grade levels in Adventist primary schools in Romania. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence, attitude toward Christianity, and academic performance in Religion and Civic studies. The findings of this study will offer valuable insights for Adventist schools in Romania and can serve as a foundation for future research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Understanding the definition of research variables, their development, and their usage in different studies over time, as well as examining the links between them in relation to the research objective, is essential to gaining a comprehensive overview and justifying the research approach. This study considers three variables: emotional intelligence, attitude toward Christianity, and academic performance. McElravy and Hastings (2014) define emotional intelligence as a range of verbal and nonverbal skills that enable a person to generate, recognize, express, understand, and evaluate their own and others' emotions so that all thoughts and actions are directed toward a favorable resolution of the demands of the situation and context and that they can interact successfully in a social context.

Research on emotional intelligence stems from Gardner's (1983) work on multiple personal intelligences (Belykh, 2019). Gardner (2005), together with his team from Harvard University, identified eight different types of intelligence. The concept

of emotional intelligence was introduced for the first time in the field of psychology in 1993 by Peter Salovey and John Mayer, who defined this concept as the ability to perceive, access, and generate one's own emotions for a better adaptation to the social environment (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). Goleman defines emotional intelligence as the ability by which we can recognize our own emotions and feelings and those of others, the ability to control and motivate ourselves, to manage our own emotions effectively, which are formed in ourselves and the relationships we have with those around us (Goleman, 2000).

Over time, different models with different dimensions of emotional intelligence have been developed. First, the ability model of Mayer and Salovey (Mayer et al., 2004) analyzes emotional intelligence as an ability centered on processing emotional information and connecting it to reason, allowing the use of emotions for more effective reasoning and a way of thinking and acting more intelligently (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Moscoso, 2019). Second, the Extremera y Fernández-Berrocal model launched in 2001 refers to the ability to regulate and manage emotional states in a correct way (Fernández-Berrocal & Ramos, 2002; Trujillo Flores & Rivas Tovar, 2005). Third, Goleman's (2000) mixed model built the first model to assess the skills required for leadership and other types of performance.

More models include five primary constructs of emotional intelligence, with twenty-five competencies: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-regulation, (3) social skill, (4) empathy, and (5) motivation (Agirre et al., 2017; García-Fernández & Giménez-Mas, 2010; Rodríguez et al., 2017; Sfetcu, 2020; Trujillo Flores & Rivas Tovar, 2005). The mixed model of Bar-On (2006) considers that social-emotional intelligence is a set of emotional and social skills that determine how well we understand and express our emotions, how well we understand the

emotions of others, and how well we relate to them in order to cope with demands, challenges and pressures (Sfetcu, 2020).

The student's attitude toward Christianity represents the attitudinal, motivational, and affective dimension toward the main pillars of the Christian religion. This study is operationalized through the Francis Scale of the attitude toward Christianity (Astley et al., 2012; Yablon, 2014). The concept of Attitude towards Christianity was created and introduced in the literature by Francis as a research variable (Tiliopoulos et al., 2013), who created a 24-item instrument to measure this variable, which was later validated in the language English (Francis, 1978b; Tiliopoulos et al., 2013). In a short period of time, it was translated and validated in Arabic, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish. It was adapted to assess the attitude towards the Islamic religion (Tiliopoulos et al., 2013), Hindu (Francis et al., 2008a), and Jewish contexts (Francis & Katz, 2007; Yablon et al., 2014). The Francis scale has also been translated and validated in Norwegian (Francis & Enger, 2002), Romanian (Francis et al., 2008), Czech (Francis et al., 2010), Slovenian (Francis et al., 2013) and Chinese (Tiliopoulos et al., 2013).

Grading is a way to appreciate and characterize students' learning performance, and grading systems can be classified according to the means of expression used: numerical, literary, qualifiers, and colors (Cucuş, 2008). Most researchers agree that academic performance results from learning produced through the didactic and pedagogical interaction between teacher and student (García, 2018). Other authors consider that academic performance is the product students achieve within the educational process, usually expressed through school grades (Martínez Otero, 2007).

Emotional intelligence has been found to have a positive relationship with academic performance (Nair et al., 2022). Studies have shown that emotional intelligence is associated

with enhanced academic performance, including higher student GPAs. Emotional intelligence has also been found to predict academic success among medical students (Benammi et al., 2022). Additionally, educators with superior emotional intelligence skills have been shown to positively impact student success (Khassawneh et al., 2022).

It has been suggested that integrating emotional intelligence instruction into the school curriculum can help produce emotionally and academically competent students (Chughati et al., 2022). Additionally, residents with higher emotional intelligence have been shown to have better academic performance and job satisfaction (Benammi et al., 2022). Some studies show no strong correlation between emotional intelligence and academic performance (Allabasi et al., 2023; Kukuruva & Kashyap, 2023). These findings emphasize the significance of emotional intelligence in academic settings and suggest that developing emotional intelligence can enhance academic performance.

No research examined how attitudes toward Christianity relate to school performance. However, some studies have shown that students with low academic results also have low religious beliefs (Padua Rodríguez, 2019), and other studies show that intrinsic religiosity is associated with greater strategic study skills (Sta Maria, 2018). The study in Pakistan highlights the significant influence of emotional and spiritual intelligence on school performance (Turi et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The present quantitative research uses instruments whose results are numerical data expressing the quantity. This can be considered an explanatory, descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional study. The subjects were examined simultaneously, and the instruments were applied in a single stage

Objectives

The main objective of this research is to analyze the relationship between attitude toward Christianity, emotional intelligence, and academic performance. In addition to this, the paper aims to evaluate the impact of grades and the environment on academic performance in Religion and Civics. It is important to understand if there is a difference in levels of emotional intelligence in relation to grades.

Variables

This study considers three dependent variables: emotional intelligence, attitude toward Christianity, and academic performance. The independent variables were grades and environment.

Hypotheses

The seven hypotheses proposed were:

H1: There is a significant difference in academic results for Religion between the 3rd and 4th grades.

H2: There is a significant difference in academic results for Civics between the 3rd and 4th grades.

H3: There is a significant difference in academic results for Religion between the urban and rural areas.

H4: There is a significant difference in academic results for Civics between the urban and rural areas.

H5: There is a significant difference in emotional intelligence scores between 3rd and 4th grades.

H6: There is a significant difference in attitude toward Christianity scores between 3rd and 4th grades.

H7: There is a significant relationship between attitude toward Christianity and academic performance.

H8: There is a significant relationship between attitude toward Christianity and emotional intelligence.

H9: There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance.

Methods

The central element of the research was a questionnaire survey. The subjects were examined simultaneously, and the instruments were applied in a single stage. These were completed in May 2022. Each teacher applied the tests after their prior training. The tests were 25 minutes, so the students had enough time to answer the 22 items, totaling the four instruments applied to the students.

Tools

The instruments used for this research are validated instruments frequently used in various research. Two instruments were applied to measure attitude towards Christianity and emotional intelligence. The questionnaire measuring Attitude towards Christianity was written by Lewis (2003) and, in its original form, had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .87. The instrument was translated, adapted, and applied to a sample of 150 children from the third and fourth grades (used with permission from Adventus University's Department of Theology, Pedagogy, and Social Work).

For the Romanian version, Cronbach's alpha was .812. This instrument comprises 7 items, and the answers are operationalized on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items translated into Romanian are the following: I know that Jesus helps me; I think going to church is a waste of time; God helps me to have a good life; God means a lot to me; Prayers help me a lot; I know that Jesus is very close to me; I believe that the Bible is a book that is no longer useful to us (Lewis, 2003).

The instrument for measuring emotional intelligence was translated and validated by Spătăreanu (2021) after a variant of

Petrides and Furnham (2001). The value obtained for Cronbach's alpha was 0.81 for a sample of 30 adolescents. The instrument was adapted in 2022 for students between the ages of 10 and 14; for this sample of 150 students, Cronbach's alpha was .762. The response options for each item were measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 7 with the following correspondence: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Partially Disagree (3), Do not Know (4), Partially Agree (5), Agreement (6), and Total Agreement (7).

Population

The population comprised 252 students from 3rd and 4th grades, aged between 9 and 12, from Adventist schools in Romania with classes in the primary cycle. The population on which the research was carried out was made up of 252 students from 9 Adventist schools in Romania as follows: Mihai Ionescu Theoretical High School in Bucharest ($n = 88$), Onisim Adventist Theological High School in Craiova ($n = 28$), "Spesranta" Macea School ($n = 8$), Matca Adventist High School ($n = 19$), "Dr. Lind" Campenita High School ($n = 14$), "Omega" Tg Mureş High School ($n = 34$), "Wilhem Moldovan" High School in Constanţa ($n = 10$), "Doctor Luca" High School in Brăila ($n = 29$) and "Soli Deo Gloria" High School in ($n = 22$) Tîrgu Mureş.

Data analysis

The data was analyzed using free statistical software, Jamovi, and PSPP. Microsoft Excel was used to prepare the data for analysis.

Ethical considerations

The collection of data and the application of the instruments were carried out after fulfilling the legal conditions in Romania to ask for the consent of the parents so that the

students could complete the questionnaires. This was completed in May 2022. The application of the tests was based on an agreement with the principals of these schools and the teachers involved in the research. Each teacher applied the tests after their prior training. The tests were 25 minutes, so the students had enough time to answer the 22 items, totaling the four instruments applied to the students.

RESULTS

This article analyzed the connection between attitudes toward Christianity, emotional intelligence, and academic performance in rural and urban areas. The research analyzed the relationship between three variables: religious education, emotional intelligence, and academic achievement.

The total values of attitude towards Christianity varied between 18 points and 35 points. For each statement to which the student gave the answer of “strongly agree,” he received 5 points; for “agree,” 4 points were offered; for “I don’t know,” 3 points were offered; for “disagree,” 2 points, and for “total disagree” 1 point. The maximum possible score was 35 points, and the minimum was 5 points. The average of the total values is 33.56. The coefficient of symmetry (Skewness) is -2.70, and the coefficient of flattening (Kurtosis) is .820; the distribution is platykurtic, with few extreme values.

The total values of the emotional intelligence variable ranged between 18 points and 35 points. These values were obtained by summing the figures obtained after coding the answers. For each statement to which the student gave the answer of total agreement, he received 5 points; for agreement, 4 points were offered; for I don’t know, 3 points were offered; for disagreement, 2 points; and for total disagreement, 1 point. The maximum possible score was 35 points, and the minimum was 5 points. The average of the total values is 57.95. The coefficient of symmetry (Skewness) is -.42, and the coefficient

of flattening (Kurtosis) is .02. The distribution is platykurtic, with few extreme values.

The total values of Religion and Civic Education ranged from 1 point to 3 points. These values were obtained by summing the figures obtained from the coding of the academic results. Thus, the qualification Sufficient was coded with the number 1, the qualification Good with the number 2, and the qualification Very good with the number 3. The minimum score is 1, and the maximum is 3.

The total values in the subject Religion, class III ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.07$) are equal to the total values from class IV ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.09$). The total values in the Civic Education discipline, class III ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .24$) are equal to the total values from class IV ($M = 2.91$, $SD = .29$). The ratio of averages between subjects, within the III a, respectively IV a class, is equal.

The slight difference between the grades in the two subjects is that the Religion subject, $M = 2.98$, is slightly superior to the Civic Education subject, $M = 2.91$. This can be explained by the popular conception that in primary classes in the Religion subject, children must have high grades, have a family interest in Religion, and that it is not worth spoiling the children's grades for a discipline that concerns personal reporting to the religious phenomenon.

The next step was applying the t-test for hypothesis verification on academic results in the Religion and Civics discipline for the 3rd and 4th grades. Verification of the differences recorded between the group of students from third grade and the group of students from fourth grade. Regarding the results obtained in the Common Disciplines, Religion, and Civics, to identify the differences between the two classes, the T-test was used Student for independent samples. The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in the Religion Discipline ($t = .68$, $p = .500$) depending on the class. Children from the third grade ($M = 2.99$, $SD = .7$) obtained

results equal to the students from the fourth grade ($M = 2.98$, $SD = .9$). The results also indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in Civic Discipline ($t = .35$, $p = .728$) depending on the class. Children from the third grade ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .24$) obtained results equal to the students from the fourth grade ($M = 2.91$, $SD = .29$).

For the attitude towards Christianity for the 3rd and 4th grades, a verification of the differences recorded between the group of students from third grade and the group of students from fourth grade was carried out. Regarding the results recorded in the Attitudes toward Christianity to identify the differences between the two classes, the Student T-test was used for independent samples. The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in Attitude toward Christianity ($t = .86$, $p = .64$) by class. Children from the third grade ($M = 33.93$, $SD = 2.23$) obtained relatively equal results to the students from the fourth grade ($M = 33.31$, $SD = 3.06$).

Regarding the results obtained in emotional intelligence, the Student T-test was used to identify the differences between the two classes. The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in Emotional Intelligence ($t = 1.62$, $p = .108$) according to class. The children in the third grade ($M = 58.95$, $SD = 6.45$) obtained relatively equal results to those of the students in the fourth grade ($M = 57.54$, $SD = 7.34$).

Considering the results between urban and rural areas for academic results, for Religion, there are statistically significant differences ($t = 2,9509$, $p = .004$). The students from urban areas ($M = 3$; $SD = .0424$) have bigger means than students from rural areas ($M = 2,95$, $SD = .218$). For Civics, there are statistically significant differences ($t = 3,4834$, $p = .001$). The students from urban areas ($M = 2,97$; $SD = .1602$) have bigger means than students from rural areas ($M = 2,80$, $SD = .398$).

The last step was analyzing the correlation between variables. According to the obtained results, it is found that there is

a correlation between the attitude towards Christianity and emotional intelligence ($r = .370$, $DF = 250$, $p < .001$). Regarding the relationship between the attitude toward Christianity and the results obtained in the Religion Discipline, the Pearson test does not reveal any special connections ($r = -.064$, $p = .316$). The attitude towards Christianity positively correlates with the results in Civic Education Discipline ($r = .173$; $p = .006$). The scores obtained for emotional intelligence did not correlate with the results obtained for the Religion Discipline ($r = -.003$, $p = .959$). Unexpectedly, interesting correlations were obtained between levels of emotional intelligence and results in Civic Education ($r = .166$; $p = .008$). The explanation of these correlations will be done in the next section.

DISCUSSIONS

The study carried out in 2020 by Huancas showed the existence of a positive correlation between the attitude toward Christianity and emotional intelligence (Huancas & Armandina, 2020) while, as early as 2016, a positive and significant relationship was found between the religious attitude and emotional intelligence (Chamani, 2016). These findings support the results of the current research. Investing in a positive attitude toward Christianity may enhance students' emotional intelligence. In this study, the results show a positive correlation between attitude towards Christianity and emotional intelligence. However, further analysis is needed. It is verified that the more favorable the attitude towards Christianity, the higher the level of emotional intelligence. It is important to understand if there is an influence in this equation.

The explanation of this result derives from the fact that synthetically, the construct of emotional intelligence can be defined from the perspective of the person's ability to perceive, access, and generate their own emotions and the ability to monitor their own and others' feelings and emotions, to be

aware of them, analyze and discriminate between them in order to use this information to determine the thinking, the actions that are necessary for the process of social adaptation as well as the constructive management of one's own emotions and the positive relationship with the emotions of another person (Goleman, 2018).

On the other hand, the student's attitude towards Christianity was defined as a motivational and affective attitude in relation to the principles of Christianity (Francis & Robbins, 2014). One of the outcomes and goals of biblical religion is controlling emotions and acting in accordance with sound thinking based on biblical principles (White, 2015). From this perspective, we can explain the moderate and positive correlation between the two constructs. However, this study cannot provide further information. In other words, can children with a positive attitude toward Christianity develop constructive emotional intelligence, which is manifested in their relationships with themselves and their schoolmates?

The inexistent relationship between the attitude toward Christianity and the results obtained in the Religion Discipline is explained by the fact that the Attitude Toward Christianity instrument measures the attitude toward religion and God, not the information learned about God. In contrast, the religion scores measure the amount of information the student retains. Added to this, the subjective element generated is that Religion is taught with the teacher's emphasis on information, attitude, and motivation.

The 2019 study showed that students with low academic results generally have diminished religious beliefs (Padua Rodríguez, 2019); no studies show a correlation between the attitude towards Christianity and school results in religious discipline. On the other hand, it shows that the teacher's expectations in the classroom have an extremely important role in the student's academic results (Hollenstein et al, 2023). This could explain the absence of a correlation between the

attitude toward Christianity and the academic results in the discipline of Religion in the present research. Thus, the results obtained do not refute any research. To better understand the phenomenon and the causes behind this reality, a qualitative study is appropriate to discover the lack of correlation between the two.

The attitude towards Christianity positively correlates with the results in Civic Education Discipline. This finding revealed by the statistical results is explained by the fact that a positive attitude towards religion is concretely seen in the behavior of the civic area managed by the Civic Education discipline. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Research relevant to the outcome of this study was conducted in 2007 and pointed out that civic education outcomes are often linked to programs such as religious attitudes (Fallacy, 2007). Moreover, recent research suggests that highly religious Catholic students tend to engage in political projects related to civic attitudes (Lin, 2021). Although the mentioned research does not speak of a correlation between the attitude towards Christianity and the academic results in the Civic Education discipline, they highlight an obvious link to which further research in this field could be added through a qualitative study, which can shed more light on the results of this research.

The scores obtained for emotional intelligence did not correlate with the results obtained for the Religion Discipline. This result was predictable after analyzing and explaining the moderate correlation between Attitude toward Christianity and Emotional Intelligence versus the lack of special connections between Attitude toward Christianity and results in the subject Religion. In other words, while Emotional Intelligence measures the person’s ability to perceive, access, and generate their own emotions and the ability to monitor their own and others’ feelings and emotions, the results in the Religion

discipline measure the amount of information the student retains about religion.

In 2023, Basiner showed that emotional intelligence positively influences learning outcomes in Islamic religious education subjects (Basiner, 2023), while religiosity correlates positively with students' emotional and moral intelligence (Latifah et al., 2022). In addition, in 2022, religiosity and self-efficacy were shown to impact emotional intelligence levels in students significantly (Zeinnida et al., 2022). Thus, the mentioned studies agree with the present research results, which showed a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and results in the religious discipline.

The correlation mentioned in the research hypothesis and the information gathered from the studies mentioned in the literature review about the existence of a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic results in the Civic Education discipline are confirmed by the results obtained from this research. A recent study shows that emotional intelligence positively affects learning outcomes in civic education (Armiza et al., 2023). The explanation of this correlation can come from the relationship between the content of the Civic Education subject, which helps the student know his rights and duties in society and his own and other people's emotional range covered by the Emotional Intelligence variable. More specifically, both variables cover the personal dimension and relating to others.

CONCLUSIONS

The research results have important implications for theory and practice. Thus, the theory about the existence of a positive link between the attitude towards Christianity and emotional intelligence is strengthened, which implies the development of programs to strengthen the attitude towards Christianity at the family and school level, which will have an impact on the

development of emotional intelligence. Thus, students with developed emotional intelligence will tend to give more importance to the subjects of Religion and Civic Education, as observed in the school results obtained in these subjects. On the other hand, a positive attitude towards Christianity will be reflected in the school results in the Civic Education discipline. Further studies will be needed to answer the question of why the positive attitude towards Christianity does not correlate with school results in the discipline of Religion.

It is important to understand the significant differences between urban and rural areas in the context of Adventist education's unique characteristics, which include institution-specific factors. At the same time, no statistically significant differences between classes in terms of academic results are normal. The level of emotional intelligence does not change between classes and is not influenced by time. One's attitude toward Christianity remains consistent over time and unaffected by external influences. Finally, it is important to carefully analyze the positive correlation between one's attitude toward Christianity and one's emotional intelligence. Several sensible aspects require further study to fully comprehend the true nature of this connection.

Further investigation is crucial to thoroughly exploring the interconnectedness among the three dependent variables. It is crucial to ascertain whether manipulating one variable and transforming it into an independent variable can elicit changes in another variable. Understanding these relationships is of utmost importance for refining educational processes and developing effective instructional strategies.

The present research has three limitations to be considered in applying the results. First, the study is carried out on Adventist primary schools in Romania, which are in the minority and are not representative of the Romanian education system. Secondly, the study did not consider the distribution of the results according to the children's religious affiliation. Thirdly,

according to research, children's academic performances also depend on other factors that can be decisive (Guerrero-López et al., 2020). Future research needs to find ways to minimize these limitations and propose new variables to fill the bland areas of knowledge.

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