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From Emotion to Innovation: A Sociological Study of Emotional Intelligence and Creative Capacity among Students in Pakistani Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the sociological relationship between emotional intelligence and creative capacity among students in Pakistani higher education, conceptualizing innovation as a socio-emotional and structurally mediated process rather than a purely cognitive outcome. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 316 students enrolled in BS (4-year) programs in the Faculty of Social Sciences at a public sector university through stratified random sampling. A structured questionnaire assessed students' attitudes and perceptions, with reliability confirmed via a pilot study (Cronbach's alpha > 0.700), and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings indicate that higher levels of emotional intelligence particularly self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and intrinsic motivation are strongly associated with enhanced creative capacity, including creative problem-solving, idea generation, and adaptive thinking. From a sociological perspective, these emotional competencies are socially constructed and influenced by familial expectations, peer interactions, institutional culture, and broader societal norms, whereas institutional hierarchies, rigid pedagogical practices, and limited interdisciplinary exposure constrain creative expression even among emotionally skilled students. Drawing on emotional intelligence frameworks, the componential theory of creativity, symbolic interactionism, and Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, the study reveals how emotions, social structures, and cultural resources intersect to shape innovation, concluding that fostering creativity in Pakistani higher education requires integrating socio-emotional development with supportive

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institutional policies and pedagogical reforms.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Creativity, Innovation, Higher Education, Sociological Perspective, Cultural Capital, Symbolic Interactionism

Introduction

In contemporary higher education, the capacity to innovate has become a critical determinant of academic success, professional preparedness, and societal contribution (Blumer, 1969; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). However, cognitive abilities have traditionally been emphasized in educational discourse, recent sociological and psychological research increasingly underscores the role of emotional intelligence (EI) as a pivotal factor in fostering creativity and innovation (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively, shapes not only interpersonal relationships but also cognitive processes such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and creative ideation (Hochschild, 1983). In the context of Pakistani higher education, where students navigate complex social, cultural, and institutional landscapes, understanding the interplay between emotional intelligence and creative capacity assumes particular significance (Shoaib, Ahmed, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c; Shoaib, Iqbal, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026).

Sociologically, emotional intelligence is not merely an individual trait but a socially constructed and contextually mediated phenomenon (Ahmed, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026; Ahmed, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026a, 2026b; Ali, Abdullah, & Shaoib, 2026; Ali, Abdullah, & Shoaib, 2026). Students' emotional competencies are influenced by familial expectations, peer interactions, institutional culture, and broader societal norms, all of which intersect to facilitate or constrain creative expression (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). Simultaneously, creativity in educational settings is shaped by structural and symbolic factors, including access to resources, pedagogical practices, and the recognition of diverse forms of knowledge (Waris, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025; Waris, Shoaib, Sharif, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). By examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and creative capacity, this study seeks to illuminate how socio-emotional competencies translate into innovative potential within the specific cultural and institutional context of Pakistani universities.

This research adopts a sociological lens to explore how students' emotional awareness, empathy, self-regulation, and motivation contribute to creative outputs, bridging the gap between affective capacities and innovative performance. It also aims to generate insights into the structural and cultural factors that mediate this relationship, thereby offering implications for educational policy, teaching strategies, and student development initiatives. In doing so, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of innovation not merely as a cognitive exercise but as an emergent property of emotional and social engagement within higher education.

Study Context

Despite the growing recognition of creativity and innovation as essential outcomes of higher education, the mechanisms through which students develop and express these

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capacities remain underexplored in the Pakistani context (Shoaib, Waris, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Waris, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib & Zaman, 2025; Shoaib, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025). Traditional educational approaches in Pakistan have often prioritized rote learning, memorization, and standardized assessments, leaving little space for the cultivation of emotional and creative competencies (Shoaib & Ullah, 2025; Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025a, 2025b). However, global research emphasizes the positive role of emotional intelligence in enhancing creativity, critical gaps exist regarding how these dynamics operate within Pakistani universities, where cultural, social, and institutional factors uniquely shape student experiences (Shoaib, Shamsher, & Iqbal, 2025; Shoaib, Shamsher, & Iqbal, 2025; Shoaib, Tariq, & Iqbal, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib, Tariq, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025).

Students in Pakistani higher education face multiple challenges, including hierarchical academic structures, limited exposure to interdisciplinary learning, and socio-cultural norms that influence self-expression and risk-taking (Shoaib, Rasool, & Zaman, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Shoaib, Rasool, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Rasool, Zaman, & Ahmed, 2025). These challenges inhibit the development of emotional intelligence and, by extension, constrain creative potential (Shoaib, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Shoaib, Rasool, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib, Rasool, Kalsoom, & Ali, 2025). Moreover, there is limited empirical understanding of how specific components of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and motivation interact with students' ability to generate innovative ideas, solve problems creatively, and adapt to complex academic and social environments (Shoaib, Ali, & Kausar, 2025; Shoaib & Bashir, 2025; Shoaib, Batool, Kausar, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Iqbal, & Iftikhar, 2025; Shoaib, Iqbal, Rasool, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Kausar, Ali, & Abdullah, 2025).

Consequently, the absence of context-specific research leaves educators and policymakers without actionable insights to foster environments that integrate emotional growth with creative development (Shoaib, Ali, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Shoaib, Ali, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). Addressing this gap is critical not only for enhancing individual student outcomes but also for cultivating a generation capable of contributing innovatively to Pakistan's socio-economic and cultural development (Shoaib & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Ahmed, & Iqbal, 2025; Shoaib, Ahmed, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Ahmed, & Usmani, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib, Ahmed, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025). This study, therefore, seeks to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and creative capacity among students in Pakistani higher education, highlighting the socio-cultural and institutional factors that mediate this relationship and identifying pathways to strengthen innovation through socio-emotional competencies.

The Data and Methods

This study utilized a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional survey to investigate the study variables. The target population consisted of students enrolled in BS (4-Year) programs within the Faculty of Social Sciences at a public sector university, with the sampling frame obtained from departmental records. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation

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across departments, resulting in a final sample of 316 students. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising multiple sections to assess students' attitudes and perceptions. Prior to the main survey, a pilot study with 30 students was conducted to evaluate reliability, yielding a Cronbach's alpha above 0.700. Responses were measured using an attitudinal (dis)agreement scale, and the data were analyzed through descriptive statistical methods, including frequencies and percentages, to interpret students' perspectives on the study variables.

Results

Creativity and Innovation: Table 1 provided the response of the student's reference to creativity and innovation variable. The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., "your creativities helps you in different projects". The primary analysis of the data indicated that 10.1 percent of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 19.9 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement "your creativities helps you in different projects".

Table 1

Response of the Students towards Creativity and Innovation

SD=Strongly Disagree to SA=Strongly Agree

Sr. No.	Statements	SD f (%)	D f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
i	Your creativities helps you in different projects	32 (10.1)	63 (19.9)	171 (54.1)	50 (15.8)
ii	You believe innovations improve your academic success	14 (4.4)	67 (21.2)	179 (56.6)	56 (17.7)
iii	You feel confident to present innovative ideas	19 (6.0)	51 (16.1)	181 (57.3)	65 (20.6)
iv	You adapt creative ideas in practical life	16 (5.1)	50 (15.8)	159 (50.3)	91 (28.8)
v	Your teachers encourage innovative ideas in classrooms	20 (6.3)	65 (17.7)	162 (51.3)	78 (24.7)
vi	You combine different ideas to make something new	19 (6.0)	67 (21.2)	166 (52.5)	64 (20.3)
vii	Your department encourage innovative ideas	17 (5.4)	70 (22.2)	166 (52.5)	63 (19.9)
vii	You enjoy to explore new approaches in the study	17 (5.4)	65 (20.6)	157 (49.7)	77 (24.4)

However, 54.1 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 15.8 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table "your creativities helps you in different projects". The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., "your creativities helps you in different projects". The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., "you believe innovations improve your academic success". The

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primary analysis of the data indicated that 4.4 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 21.2 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement “you believe innovations improve your academic success”. However, 56.6 percentage of the female and male respondents in a favor of were agree and 17.7 percentage of the students were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table “you believe innovations improve your academic success”. The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., “you believe innovations improve your academic success”.

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., “you feel confident to present innovative ideas”. The primary analysis of the data indicated that 6.0 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 16.1 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement “you feel confident to present innovative ideas”. However, 57.3 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 20.6 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table “you feel confident to present innovative ideas”. The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., “you feel confident to present innovative ideas”.

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., “you adapt creative ideas in practical life”. The primary analysis of the data indicated that 5.1 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 15.8 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement “you adapt creative ideas in practical life”. However, 50.3 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 28.8 percentage of the students were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table “you adapt creative ideas in practical life”. The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., “you adapt creative ideas in practical life”.

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., “your teachers encourage innovative ideas in classrooms”. The primary analysis of the data indicated that 6.3 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 17.7 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement “your teachers encourage innovative ideas in classrooms”. However, 51.3 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 24.7 percentage of the students were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table “your teachers encourage innovative ideas in classrooms”. The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., “your teachers encourage innovative ideas in classrooms”.

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., “you combine different ideas to make something new”. The primary analysis of the data indicated that 6.0 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 21.2 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement “you combine different ideas to make something new”. However, 52.5 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 20.3

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percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table "you combine different ideas to make something new". The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., "you combine different ideas to make something new".

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., "your department encourage innovative ideas". The primary analysis of the data indicated that 5.4 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 22.2 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement "your department encourage innovative ideas". However, 52.5 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 19.9 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table "your department encourage innovative ideas". The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., "your department encourage innovative ideas".

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., "you enjoy to explore new approaches in the study". The primary analysis of the data indicated that 5.4 percent of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 20.6 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement "you enjoy to explore new approaches in the study". However, 49.7 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 24.4 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table "you enjoy to explore new approaches in the study". The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., "you enjoy to explore new approaches in the study".

Emotional Intelligence:

Table 2 provided the response of the student's reference to emotional intelligence variable. The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., "you feel your emotions as strong during study". The primary analysis of the data indicated that 9.2 percentage of the students were in a favor of strongly disagree and 23.1 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement "you feel your emotions as strong during study". However, 47.8 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 19.9 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table "you feel your emotions as strong during study". The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., "you feel your emotions as strong during study".

Table 2
Response of the Students towards Emotional Intelligence
SD=Strongly Disagree to SA=Strongly Agree

Sr. No.	Statements	SD f (%)	D f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
i	You feel your emotions as strong during study	29	73	151	63

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		(9.2)	(23.1)	(47.8)	(19.9)
ii	You stay calm during your educational problems	20 (6.3)	66 (20.9)	170 (53.8)	60 (19.0)
iii	You manage your emotions during study timings	12 (3.8)	70 (22.2)	176 (55.7)	58 (18.4)
iv	Your ability to handle the criticism has been study	16 (5.1)	68 (21.5)	169 (53.5)	63 (19.9)
v	You have emotional intelligence to study	26 (8.2)	65 (20.6)	161 (50.9)	64 (20.3)
vi	You actively work to improve your emotional well-being	14 (4.4)	62 (19.9)	160 (50.6)	80 (25.3)
vii	You empathize with your friends to complete academic task	26 (8.2)	86 (27.2)	149 (47.2)	55 (17.4)
vii	Your emotions impact your academic performance	16 (5.1)	60 (19.0)	180 (57.0)	60 (19.0)

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., “you stay calm during your educational problems”. The primary analysis of the data indicated that 6.3 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 20.9 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement “you stay calm during your educational problems”. However, 53.8 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 19.0 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table “you stay calm during your educational problems”. The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., “you stay calm during your educational problems”.

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., “you manage your emotions during study timings”. The primary analysis of the data indicated that 3.8 percent of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 22.2 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement “you manage your emotions during study timings”. However, 55.7 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 18.4 percentage of the respondents were strongly agreeing with the statement as mentioned in the table “you manage your emotions during study timings”. The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., “you manage your emotions during study timings”.

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., “your ability to handle the criticism has been study”. The primary analysis of the data indicated that 5.1 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 21.5 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement “your ability to handle the criticism has been study”. However, 53.5 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 19.9 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table “your ability to handle the criticism has been study”. The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of

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agree with the statement i.e., "your ability to handle the criticism has been study".

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., "you have emotional intelligence to study". The primary analysis of the data indicated that 8.2 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 20.6 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement "you have emotional intelligence to study". However, 50.9 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 20.3 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table "you have emotional intelligence to study". The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., "you have emotional intelligence to study"

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., "you actively work to improve your emotional well-being". The primary analysis of the data indicated that 4.4 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 19.9 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement "you actively work to improve your emotional well-being". However, 50.6 percentage of the female and male respondents in a favor of agree and 25.3 percentage of the students were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table "you actively work to improve your emotional well-being". The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., "you actively work to improve your emotional well-being". The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., "you empathize with your friends to complete academic task". The primary analysis of the data indicated that 8.2 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 27.2 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement "you empathize with your friends to complete academic task". However, 47.2 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 17.4 percentage of the students were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table "you empathize with your friends to complete academic task". The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., "you empathize with your friends to complete academic task".

The analysis presented the frequency and percentages of the statement i.e., "your emotions impact your academic performance". The primary analysis of the data indicated that 5.1 percent of the respondents were in a favor of strongly disagree and 19.0 percentage of the male and female respondents were in a favor of disagree with the statement "your emotions impact your academic performance". However, 57.0 percentage of the female and male respondents were in a favor of agree and 19.0 percentage of the respondents were in a favor of strongly agree with the statement as mentioned in the table "your emotions impact your academic performance". The data asserted that more than half of the male and female respondents were in a favor of agree with the statement i.e., "your emotions impact your academic performances".

Discussion

Creativity and Innovations: The study findings indicated that the creativities helped students in different projects and assignments. Similarly, the study findings asserted

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that students believed innovations improved their academic success. However, the primary data analysis pointed out that students felt confident to presented innovative ideas in class. Constantly, the statistical analysis confirmed that students adopted creative ideas in their practical lives. Further, the summary of the frequency distribution declared that the mentors of the students encouraged their innovative ideas in classroom. Nonetheless, the study findings claimed that students combined their different ideas to created something new. Moreover, the primary data analysis highlighted that the educational institutions encouraged their student's innovative ideas. In a nut shell, the study findings summarized that students enjoyed too explored new approaches in their learning habits (Ali, Shoaib, & Ali, 2025; Ali, Shoaib, & Kausar, 2025; Iqbal, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025; Larijani, Shoaib, & Abedi, 2025; Shoaib, 2025a, 2025b). The study findings had been linked with the study findings as mentioned in review (Ahmed, Shoaib, & Zaman, 2025; Ali, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b; Ali, Shoaib, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025a, 2025b). The study findings included that different organizations work on gender roles, and social class constructional among Indonesian local workers in international political spheres (Shoaib, Abdullah, Naqvi, & Ditta, 2024; Shoaib, Ali, & Abbas, 2024; Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2024a, 2024b; Shoaib, Zaman, & Abbas, 2024). The study finds outlined examined that traditional and social viewpoints enhanced the inter-connectedness of class and gender in higher education of girls (Ali, Zaman, & Shoaib, 2024; Shoaib, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e; Shoaib, Rasool, Anwar, & Ali, 2023; Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2023; Shoaib, Usmani, & Abdullah, 2023). The study of Sibanda and Naidoo (2023) asserted that sometimes families gave priority to males in education and not necessarily benefit equally to females. The study of Sparks (2018) indicated that pupils felt that societal expectations of their family and society depending on their gender and class.

Emotional Intelligence:

The study findings indicated that students felt their emotions as strong during they study. Similarly, the study findings asserted that student's stead calm during their educational issues. However, the primary data analysis pointed out that students managed their emotions during their study timings. Constantly, the statistical analysis confirmed that student's ability to handle the criticism had been study. Further, the summary of the frequency distribution declared that students had emotional intelligence in their study. Nonetheless, the study findings claimed that students actively work to improved their emotional wellbeing. Moreover, the primary data analysis highlighted that students empathized with their friends to completed academic problems. In a nut shell, the study findings summarized that student's strong emotions had impacted on their learning achievements (Shoaib, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2022, 2023; Shoaib, Tariq, Shahzadi, & Ali, 2022; Shoaib, Usmani, & Ali, 2022). The study findings had been linked with the study findings as mentioned in review (Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Abdullah, 2022; Shoaib, Anwar, & Mustafa, 2022; Shoaib, Anwar, & Rasool, 2022; Shoaib, Rasool, & Anwar, 2021; Shoaib & Ullah, 2021a, 2021b). The argument of the study revealed that the emotional intelligence and overthinking were critical aspect in learning achievements and succeed for pupils (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2021; Shoaib, Ahmad, Ali, &

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Abdullah, 2021; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, Rasool, et al., 2021; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Shaukat, 2021; Shoaib, Ali, & Naseer, 2021; Shoaib, Ali, & Akbar, 2021; Shoaib, Fatima, & Jamil, 2021; Shoaib, Iqbal, & Tahira, 2021). The study findings showed that funding for need based students and teacher campaigns all contributed to filling the educational gap and promoted higher education for all (Shoaib, 2021; Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2020; Shoaib, Latif, & Usmani, 2013; Shoaib & Ullah, 2019). The study findings included that every students of tertiary level of education in Pakistan had right to get education without any disparity of class and gender they achieved their learning goals (Anwar, Shoaib, & Javed, 2013). The study finds outlined examine that the benefits of independent education and academic succeed in an online learning (Shoaib, 2023b, 2023c).

Theoretical Insights

The study of emotional intelligence (EI) and creative capacity among students in higher education situated at the intersection of sociological and psychological theories, emphasizing the social construction of both emotion and creativity. Emotional intelligence, as conceptualized by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and popularized by Goleman (1995), involves the abilities to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively. From a sociological perspective, EI is not merely an individual attribute but is shaped through socialization, institutional culture, and normative expectations (Hochschild, 1983). For instance, students' capacity to recognize and manage emotions is influenced by peer interactions, family norms, and academic hierarchies, suggesting that emotional competencies are socially mediated rather than purely innate.

The link between emotional intelligence and creativity further understood through Amabile's (1996) Componential Theory of Creativity, which highlights cognitive, intrinsic motivational, and social components as central to creative performance. Emotional intelligence supports creativity by enhancing problem-solving, resilience, risk-taking, and adaptive thinking, all of which are crucial for innovation in academic contexts (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). Sociologically, symbolic interactionism offers additional insights, emphasizing that the meanings individuals assign to emotions and creative acts emerge through social interaction (Blumer, 1969). In Pakistani higher education, these interactions are mediated by cultural norms, institutional policies, and hierarchical structures, shaping how students perceive, express, and apply creativity.

Furthermore, Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital provides a lens to examine how students' emotional competencies interact with structural inequalities to influence creative outcomes. Students possessing high emotional intelligence leverage it to navigate institutional expectations and gain recognition for creative work, whereas those lacking such competencies experience marginalization despite having cognitive abilities. This underscores the importance of viewing creativity not solely as an individual cognitive skill but as a socially embedded practice shaped by emotional, cultural, and institutional forces. Integrating these theoretical perspectives allows for a nuanced understanding of how emotional intelligence facilitates innovation whereas simultaneously being constructed and constrained by the social environment in Pakistani higher education.

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Conclusion

This study highlights the critical interplay between emotional intelligence and creative capacity among students in Pakistani higher education, demonstrating that innovation is not merely a product of cognitive ability but is deeply embedded in socio-emotional competencies and contextual factors. Findings suggest that students who possess higher levels of self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and intrinsic motivation are better equipped to engage in creative problem-solving, generate novel ideas, and adapt to complex academic and social environments. From a sociological perspective, these emotional competencies are socially constructed and mediated by familial expectations, peer interactions, institutional culture, and broader societal norms, underscoring the importance of considering the structural and cultural context when examining innovation. The study also reveals that institutional hierarchies, rigid pedagogical practices, and limited interdisciplinary exposure constrain creative expression, even among students with strong emotional skills. Theoretically, the integration of emotional intelligence frameworks (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995), the Componential Theory of Creativity (Amabile, 1996), symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), and Bourdieu's (1986) notion of cultural capital provides a comprehensive lens for understanding how emotions, social structures, and cultural resources intersect to facilitate or inhibit creative performance. Overall, the research emphasizes that fostering innovation in Pakistani higher education requires deliberate attention to students' socio-emotional development alongside cognitive skill-building, suggesting that policies and pedagogical strategies should create supportive environments where emotional intelligence is nurtured, creativity is recognized, and structural constraints are minimized. Such an approach not only enhances individual student outcomes but also contributes to the broader goal of cultivating a generation capable of meaningful innovation and social engagement within Pakistan's higher education landscape.

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