

The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence, Life Satisfaction, and Stress Management

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Abstract

This study examines whether students' stress management levels from Azerbaijan and Turkey are predicted by life satisfaction and emotional intelligence and differ by gender. The research was conducted with the participation of 435 university students. The research data were obtained through the Emotional Intelligence Scale, the Satisfaction with Life Scale, and the Coping with Stress Scale. The study results found that university students' emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, and stress management significantly differed by gender. In the path analysis, where stress management was the dependent variable, it was found that the combination of emotional intelligence and life satisfaction of the students in Azerbaijan did not predict stress management at a significant level, whereas for the students in Turkey, the combination of these two variables was shown to predict stress management at a significant level. Finally, it was observed that emotional intelligence and life satisfaction explained 18% of the variance in stress management.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, stress management

Introduction

Stress, as frequently stated today, is a fact of life. The psychological and mental state of individuals affects work performance and affects their life satisfaction and stress management. Mental and emotional states, moreover, affect the attitudes and behavior toward stress creating factors. As a result, there has been much attention given to the role that emotions play in an individual's social, private, and work lives.

Daniel Goleman's book, "Emotional Intelligence," published in 1995, has played a significant role today in highlighting the concept of emotional intelligence. Reuven Bar-on, another author who contributed to the development of emotional intelligence, having carried out several studies on the subject, describes emotional intelligence as the totality of unconscious skills, including adaptability and

interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and general mood. However, in contrast to other authors, Bar-on asserts that emotional intelligence also involves stress management ability (Bar-on, 1997:3)

Much emphasis has been placed on the concept of emotional intelligence, which can be defined as self-awareness of emotions, ability to take control of feelings, self-motivation following a defined target, understanding of other people's emotions, and possession of social skills, and the role it has in sustaining the life of individuals within the existing conditions and in managing their stress. Since emotional intelligence functions as a key factor that affects an individual's success in their personal and work life, the present study aims to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, and stress management.

Ability to detect and evaluate stress and understand, assess and manage the events that give rise to it impact the rise or fall of stress. As a factor governing the effective management of self and the self's relationships with the environment, emotional intelligence has a significant role in coping with stressful situations. The proper use of general emotions to achieve intended aims in private and social life will positively affect an individual's life satisfaction and stress management. Individuals, who by nature are in constant interaction with their environment, experience problems that generate stress and directly affect their life satisfaction. However, individuals can effectively manage stress by positively using their emotional intelligence and thereby improving their life satisfaction.

The conceptual framework of emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, and stress management

Emotional Intelligence

While emotional intelligence is a relatively new and expanding subject for behavioral research, it has nonetheless attracted the attention of the scientific community, academicians, business corporations, and the general public, as can be seen by the number of studies on the subject constituting the body of literature (Anand & Udayasuriyan, 2010:65). Broadly defined, emotional intelligence represents a set of competencies for identifying, processing, and managing emotions (Zeidner et al., 2004) and is understood as a combination of emotion-specific abilities (Frajó-Apor et al., 2017:35).

Goleman (1995:62) defined emotional intelligence as “self-activation, ability to continue despite negativities, ability to postpone satisfaction by taking control over

impulses, ability to regulate mental states, rejection of disturbances that prevent healthy cognitive functions, ability to put self in the place of other people, and having a sense of hopefulness.” Besides, emotional intelligence is conceptualized as an individual’s self-awareness (Swarnalatha & Sureshkrishna, 2013:46). Furthermore, emotional intelligence has been referred to as the ability to identify, express, and understand emotions; to assimilate emotions into thought; and to regulate, in a healthy balance, both positive and negative emotions in oneself and to recognize this range of emotions in others (Matthews et al., 2004:3).

Goleman’s emotional intelligence model is a mixed model, like Bar-On’s, and includes five main components under the dimension of emotional intelligence, namely, “self-awareness; self-regulation; motivation; empathy; and social skills(Rahim et al., 2002:304-305). These components have been accepted as the main categories of emotional intelligence in the literature.

Emotional intelligence represents the needs, impulses, and real values that direct all the apparent behaviors of the person and determines the success in business life and relationships with people (Güllüce & İşcan, 2010:10). In his book, “Emotional Intelligence,” Goleman (1995: 62) argued that IQ only contributes to at best 20% of the total factors that determine life success. Other elements determine the remaining 80%”, which suggests the importance of emotional intelligence in private and working life. At the same time, individuals with well-developed emotional intelligence can adopt mental habits that serve to increase their productivity by maintaining their lives in a more satisfied and effective way; on the other hand, individuals who are unable to command control over their emotional life may clash with others, the results of which would undermine their ability to focus on work and think in a clear manner (Goleman, 1995:65). Looking at from a different perspective, it could be stated that emotional intelligence is especially useful under unfavorable circumstances, insofar as it helps individuals to fight through these circumstances and continue their life in a healthy emotional state by applying emotional skills such as empathy, determination, keeping pace with the environment, self-control, self-motivation, and emotional control (Yelkikalan, 2006:40).

Life Satisfaction

The concept of life satisfaction, which emerged into the enlightenment era of the 18th century, served as a measure of the good life and affected welfare development up to the 19th century. Throughout the end of the 20th century, intellectuals sought to find a suitable definition for life satisfaction, one that was capable of predicting the components and the measurement of a good life. The concept of life quality was

introduced in the 1960s. However, in the mid-1980s, the social indicators revealed that money could not buy happiness, a finding that changed the criteria for traditional economic well-being and satisfaction. The early response to this idea served as confirmation that there was more to the human way of life than material gratification (Prasoon & Chaturvedi, 2016:25). Life satisfaction is the first of the essential elements needed by people to be happy and derive meaning from life. Emmons et al. (1985), who developed today's commonly used Satisfaction with Life scale, defined the concept of life satisfaction as the positive evaluation of all of life in a manner compatible with self-prescribed criteria. Life satisfaction is a conscious cognitive judgment of one's life, for which the criteria for judgment are determined by the individual (Diener, 1984:550). The concept of life satisfaction is an essential issue for all individuals, considering that, as individuals seek to derive meaning from life in their interactions with their environment, they continue to work towards getting the most satisfaction out of life.

Veenhoven (1996) defined life satisfaction as the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as a whole. Christopher (1999) explained life satisfaction as an overall assessment of the quality of life in terms of family, school, friends, etc., according to one's own criteria of the good life. Suppose life satisfaction is seen as a positive degree of development in each area of an individual's life. In that case, it can be argued that it also affects the individual's work-life, especially insofar as work is an indispensable part of an individual's life and affects their loyalty to the organization. In general, life satisfaction can be defined as an individual's emotional reaction to life, defined as work, leisure, and other non-work time (Sung-Mook & Giannakopoulos, 1994). Individuals' life satisfaction can be affected by many things, including daily life happiness, the meaningfulness of life, stress, consistency in reaching targets, a positive individual identity, physical well-being, economic security, and social relations. Accordingly, it is important to examine life satisfaction and emotional intelligence, and stress management.

Stress management

Defined as the disease of the modern era, stress appears as a part of daily life. Indeed, it has become such a part of life that people's intense stress burdens are often not even realized by them. Self-management and the ability to know how to manage stress are two of the basic conditions for a healthy life. A satisfied and happy life can be attained through emotional intelligence and its attendant knowledge and abilities.

Selye is a scientist who is known as the father of stress. Selye defined stress as the body's non-specific response to any demand for change (Selye, 1976:53). "General Adaptation Syndrome', which is also referred to in the literature as "Selye's Syndrome," divides the total response from stress into three phases: the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance, and the stage of exhaustion (Tan & Yip, 2018:170). Stress generally has negative connotations and is a commonly used concept in daily life. It emerges when an individual responds to an impulse that requires extra psychological and physical effort. These physical or psychological impulses are expressed as stressors and cause stress in individuals (Ergeneli, 2017: 280).

In his book, "Stress and Emotion," Lazarus defined stress as an "important event that causes an intense and distressing outcome and affects behaviors," and he argued that stress occurs in environments where people work together and have close relationships (Lazarus, 2006:29). The application of strategies to cope with stress is referred to as stress management. The CALM model developed by Braham to manage stress includes the four phases of "change the situation, accept what cannot be changed, let go, and manage your lifestyle (Braham, 1998:57-59).

Methodology

This study applied the relational survey model to analyze the relationship between emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, and university students' stress management. SEM analysis was performed to test the model's ability to measure the relationship between emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, and stress management.

Sample

In the study, a survey was administered to 448 students from Azerbaijan and Turkey. A total of 435 survey forms were accepted for data analysis, after excluding those that had missing information or were not completely filled out.

Data Collection Tools

In the application section of the study, a survey was used as the data collection tool. The survey consisted of four sections. The first section included questions related to the demographic characteristics of the participants. In the second section, the

“Satisfaction with Life” scale was used to measure the participants' life satisfaction levels. In the third section, the “Emotional Intelligence” scale was used to measure the participants' emotional intelligence levels. Finally, in the fourth section, the “Coping with Stress” scale was used to measure the participants' stress management levels.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale

“The Satisfaction with Life Scale” was used to measure the participants' satisfaction with life level. This scale was developed by Diener, Emmons, Laresen, and Griffin (1985) and adapted to Turkish by Köker (1991). The scale consists of five items on life satisfaction. However, as a result of the confirmatory factor analysis, one item's factor value was below 0.30 and excluded from the study scope (Hair et al., 2014: 102). Results from the reliability analysis showed that the alpha value of the scale was .722. The calculated Cronbach's alpha value indicated that the scale was reliable. The alpha coefficient ranges in value from 0 to 1 and may be used to describe the reliability of factors extracted from dichotomous (that is, questions with two possible answers) and/or multi-point formatted questionnaires or scales (i.e., rating scale: 1 = poor, 5 = excellent). The higher the score, the more reliable the generated scale is. Nunnally (1978) has indicated a 0.7 to acceptable reliability coefficient, but lower thresholds are sometimes used in the literature.

Emotional Intelligence Scale

The Emotional Intelligence Scale was used to measure the participants' emotional intelligence level. This commonly used scale was developed by Wong and Law (2002) and has four dimensions, namely, “perceiving emotions,” “managing emotions,” “understanding emotions,” and “using emotions to facilitate thought.” The scale is 5-point Likert type (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neither agree nor Disagree, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree) and consists of 16 items. However, as a result of the confirmatory factor analysis, one item's factor value was below 0.30 and excluded from the study scope (Hair et al., 2014: 102). Results from the reliability analysis showed that the alpha value of the scale was .848. The calculated Cronbach's alpha value indicated that the scale was highly reliable (Nunnally, 1978).

Coping with Stress Scale

The “Coping with Stress Scale” was used to measure the participants' coping levels with stress. This scale was developed by Folkman and Lazarus and adapted to

Turkish by Şahin and Durak (1995). In the Turkish version, the scale consists of five sub-factors, namely, "seeking or using social support," "focusing on the positive," "distancing," "cognitive escape-avoidance," and "behavioral escape-avoidance." The Inventory of Coping with Stress Ways is a four-point Likert-type scale and consists of 30 items. However, as a result of the confirmatory factor analysis, eleven items' factor values were found to be below 0.30 and therefore excluded from the study scope (Hair et al., 2014: 102). The result from the reliability analysis showed that the alpha value of the scale was .834. The calculated Cronbach's alpha value indicated that the scale was highly reliable (Nunnally, 1978).

Findings

In this study, the AMOS 21 software program, a structural equation modeling program, was used to test the model. The structural equation model is an effective statistical method for simultaneously testing all the variables of complex models. "The basic model" was tested using the AMOS 21 software. With the aid of SPSS 21, descriptive statistics were used to define the participants' demographic characteristics. Next, the confirmatory factor analysis was carried out using the AMOS 21 software, and the path analysis was performed to test the model.

Descriptive statistics of male and female teachers' mindsets on the post-method pedagogy indicates that male and female teachers' mean scores are 3.69 and 3.95, respectively. Accordingly, the female teachers seem to have more positive mindsets on the post-method pedagogy in general (mean =3.95) as well as in the principles of practicality (mean =4.30) and learner role (mean =3.95) than male teachers. The above findings were confirmed through inferential statistics, as shown in Table 9.

Table 1

The Frequency Analysis of the Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Country		
Azerbaijan	185	42.5
Turkey	250	57.5
Total	435	100.0
Gender		
Male	123	28.3

Female	312	71.7
Total	435	100.0

Examining the sample's demographic characteristics, it can be seen that 42.5% (N=185) of the participants were from Azerbaijan and that 57.5% (N=250) of the participants were from Turkey. Of the participants, 28.3% (N=123) were male, and 71.7% (N=312) were female.

Table 2

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the Variables

			SWL		EI		STRESS	
Fit Measures	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit	Default Model	Revised Model	Default Model	Revised Model	Default Model	Revised Model
RMS EA	0<RE MSEA <0.05	0.05 ≤ RMSEA ≤ 0.10	.122	.054	.084	.051	.054	.044
CFI	0.97 ≤ CFI ≤ 1	0.95 ≤ CFI ≤ 0.97	.918	.987	.875	.959	.889	.929
GFI	0.95 ≤ GFI ≤ 1	0.90 ≤ GFI ≤ 0.95	.967	.992	.904	.956	.920	.939
χ²/df	0< χ ² /df<3		37.225/ 5 =7.445	9.067/4 =2.267	326.737 /81=4.0 34	152.289 /72=2.1 15	321.334 /141=2. 279	251.246 /136=1. 847

Source: (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003: 52).

In the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), the value for testing the proposed model's statistical convenience and the data analyzed is χ^2 (Schumacker, 2004: 82). In the sample of the study (N=435), since the χ^2 value of the life satisfaction variable for the sample of the study (N=435) was high (37.225) for the model, the df adjusted value of χ^2 (9.067) was considered. However, the value prior to the adjustments is also presented in the table. As the χ^2 /df value was found to be 2.267 (acceptable fit interval was 0-3), the model was accepted as being statistically significant. Again, since the χ^2 value of the emotional intelligence variable was high (326.737) for the

model, the df adjusted χ^2 value (152.289) was considered. As the χ^2/df value was found to be 2.115, the model was accepted as being statistically significant. Since the χ^2 value of the stress management variable was high (321.334) for the model, the df adjusted χ^2 value (251.246) was considered. As the χ^2/df value was 1.847, the model was accepted as statistically significant. However, one statistical significance test alone is not sufficient to accurately define the model obtained from the CFA data and the structural equality modeling, and thus, it is required that several criteria be evaluated (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003: 31-33). Other statistical significance tests (goodness of fit indices) and acceptable intervals were presented in the table. The goodness of fit measures the observed input matrix's fitness estimated from the proposed model (covariance or correlation) or the model's consistency with the empirical data (Hair et al., 1998: 610-611; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003: 31). The goodness of fit indices of the model, namely, RMSEA, CFI, and GFI, were within the acceptable limits. In other words, the model was found to be statistically reliable.

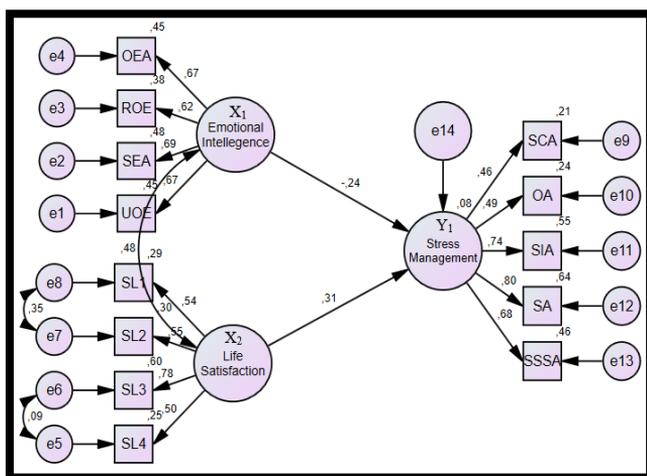


Figure 1. Basic Model

Correlations

	X ₁	X ₂	Y ₁
X ₁	1.0		
X ₂	0.484	1.0	
Y ₁	-0.085	0.196	1.0

X1 = Emotional Intelligence, X2 = Life Satisfaction, Y1= Stress Management

If only one arrow links two constructs (path analysis can also be conducted with variables), then the relationship between them is equal to the parameter estimate between those two constructs. For now, this relationship can be called a direct relationship (Hair et al., 2014:592-593).

Direct paths

Direct paths

A= X₁ to X₂

A= Emotional Intelligence to Satisfaction with Life= 0.48

B= X₁ to Y₁

B= Emotional Intelligence to Stress= -0.24

C= X₂ to Y₁

C= Satisfaction with Life to Stress= 0.31

Table 3

Fit Indices of the Model

Fit Measures	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit	Default model	Revised model
RMSEA	0<REMSEA<0.05	0.05 ≤ RMSEA ≤ 0.10	.070	.061
CFI	0.97 ≤ CFI ≤ 1	0.95 ≤ CFI ≤ 0.97	.910	.934
GFI	0.95 ≤ GFI ≤ 1	0.90 ≤ GFI ≤ 0.95	.932	.945
x²/df	0 < x ² /df < 3		192.823/62=3.110	156.492/60=2.608

Source: (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003: 52).

In examining the standardized regression (Beta) coefficients, it can be seen that emotional intelligence level had a negative effect on stress management ($\beta=-.24$; $p<0.05$), that life satisfaction had a positive effect on stress management ($\beta=0.31$; $p<0.05$), and that there was a medium level significant relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction ($r=0.48$). Overall, emotional intelligence and life satisfaction explained 8% of the variance of stress management.

Table 4

The Comparison of the Model for Azerbaijan and Turkey

Fit Measure s	Good Fit	Acceptabl e Fit	Default model	Revised model
RMSEA	0<REMSEA<0.05	0.05 ≤ RMSEA ≤ 0.10	.053	.047
CFI	0.97 ≤ CFI ≤ 1	0.95 ≤ CFI ≤ 0.97	.907	.931
GFI	0.95 ≤ GFI ≤ 1	0.90 ≤ GFI ≤ 0.95	.909	.922
x²/df	0< x ² /df<3		277.283/124=2.236	233.531/120=1.946

Source: (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003: 52).

In examining the standardized regression (Beta) coefficients, it can be seen that the emotional intelligence levels of the participants from Azerbaijan did not have any significant effect on stress management ($\beta=.07$; $p>0.05$), and that their life satisfaction did not have any significant effect on stress management ($\beta=-.03$; $p>0.05$)’ however, there was a high level significant relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction ($r=0.71$). In examining the participants from Turkey, it can be seen that the emotional intelligence level had a negative effect on stress management ($\beta=-.30$; $p<0.05$), that life satisfaction had a positive effect on stress management ($\beta=0.36$; $p<0.05$), and that there was a weakly significant relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction ($r=0.19$). Overall, emotional intelligence and life satisfaction explained 18% of the variance of stress management.

Table 5

Multi-Group (Female-Male) Analysis Outcomes

Fit Measure s	Good Fit	Acceptabl e Fit	Default model	Revised model
RMSEA	0<REMSEA<0.05	0.05 ≤ RMSEA ≤ 0.10	.052	.046

CFI	$0.97 \leq \text{CFI} \leq 1$	$0.95 \leq \text{CFI} \leq 0.97$.902	.926
GFI	$0.95 \leq \text{GFI} \leq 1$	$0.90 \leq \text{GFI} \leq 0.95$.915	.927
χ^2/df	$0 < \chi^2/\text{df} < 3$		$268.266/124=2.16$ 3	$228.740/120=1.90$ 6

In examining the standardized regression (Beta) coefficients, it can be seen that the emotional intelligence levels of the male participants did not have any significant effect on stress management ($\beta=-.04$; $p>0.05$), that their life satisfaction did not have any significant effect on stress management ($\beta=.10$; $p>0.05$), and that there was a medium level significant relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction ($r=0.49$). In examining the female participants, it can be seen that the emotional intelligence level had a negative effect on stress management ($\beta=-.31$; $p<0.05$), that life satisfaction had a positive effect on stress management ($\beta=0.38$; $p<0.05$), and that there was a medium level significant relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction ($r=0.45$). Overall, emotional intelligence and life satisfaction explained 13% of the variance of stress management.

Conclusion and suggestions

According to the study results, (1) for the university students from Azerbaijan, there was a positive, strong relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction, which supports the results reported in the studies conducted by Liu et al., 2013; Feng Kong et al., 2012; Bhullar et al., 2012; Ignat and Clipa, 2012; Extremera and Fernandez-Berrocal, 2005; Palmer et al., 2002, while for the university students from Turkey, there was a weak relationship between these two variables. Considering that an individual's comparison of their own situation to other situations that they accept to be a suitable standard for themselves plays a role in the establishment of subjective life-satisfaction judgments (Diener et al., 1985), it is important to note the presence of external factors that affect life satisfaction. Also, it has been stated that perceived life satisfaction has a strong relationship with a compound index consisting of objective life quality indicators (economic status, health, culture, entertainment, freedom, etc.) (Diener & Suh, 1997). Furthermore, university students' life satisfaction levels differ in terms of the variables of academic success, perceived economic status, future expectations, religious belief, and loneliness. The outcome of this research can be evaluated in the context of the economic freedom of university students. According to Tuzgöl Dost (2007),

university students' life satisfaction increases when their perceived economic status increases. Considering all of these, it can be argued that the country's economic and social structure affects the power of the relationship between life satisfaction and emotional intelligence in university students.

(2) No significant relationship was found between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction, and stress management for Azerbaijan students. It is believed that this result could be attributed to the political and social structure of Azerbaijan and the fact that the sample involved young people, who do not necessarily have a strong sense of responsibility. For the students from Turkey, a negative relationship was found between emotional intelligence and stress management, particularly in terms of stress perception, a result supported by various studies in the literature (Nespereira-Campuzano & Vazquez-Campo, 2017; Gangai & Argawal, 2013; Montes - Berges & Augusto, 2007; Hede, 2010; Noorbakhsh et al., 2010; Kumar & Rooprai, 2009; Naidoo, 2008; Pau et al., 2007; Oginska-Bulik, 2005; Ioannis & Ioannis, 2002). In accordance with this result, it can be argued that individuals with high emotional intelligence do not experience the feeling of stress much and, therefore, do not have to deal with coping with stress; meaning, in other words, that individuals with high emotional intelligence are successful at managing stress, even they are unaware of it. A significant positive relationship was found between life satisfaction and stress management. College students with high life satisfaction have been shown to have more demanding lifestyles than those of individuals with low life satisfaction, but they nonetheless did not suffer greater personal stress (Bailey & Miller, 1998).

(3) In this study, the role of gender was also examined in the relationship between emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, and stress management. A medium-level relationship was determined between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction for both groups. Although there was a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress management in females, no such relationship was determined for males' case. In some studies examining the life satisfaction of university students, the findings vary, with some showing that general life satisfaction is higher in females (Tuzgöl Dost, 2007), and others reporting that it does not differ by gender (Bailey & Miller, 1998; Zullig, Huebner, & Pun, 2009). In Turkish culture, the social gender role ascribed to being a female or a male, and the attributed values of these roles are believed to be the source of the differences in stress management by gender. Moreover, in this study, the role of gender, particularly on the relationship between emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, and stress management, was found to be remarkable.

This study sought to determine the effect of emotional intelligence and life satisfaction levels on university students' stress management from Azerbaijan and Turkey. Considering that the sample for this study involved only university students from one province in Turkey and one province in Azerbaijan, it is suggested that future studies be conducted in different provinces and that comparisons be made with other studies involving different provinces. Student success in life cannot be measured by the diplomas they have or the salaries they earn. Instead, their efforts to achieve success in each area of life can be supported by developing their emotional intelligence skills, sense of life satisfaction, and stress management skills. In this regard, to help students reach their objectives in all aspects of their lives and gain a greater sense of happiness, studies should be carried out at each level of education to develop an understanding of how to foster emotional awareness and empathy for other people's emotions in students and how to best help them manage their emotions, increase their life satisfaction, and manage their stress. If the students are strong emotionally, they will handle stressful situations better and make independent decisions in their professional and personal lives. In all, emotional intelligence will help students' overall growth so, and it is necessary to have people with strong emotional intelligence. In addition, to increase the students' life satisfaction, universities, non-governmental organizations, and the government should conduct more studies on easing students' economic troubles and mitigating their future concerns. Lastly, these institutions should also investigate what can be done to improve other factors that affect life satisfaction (health, culture, entertainment, freedom, etc.).

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