Research Paper

Emotional Intelligence and Academic Resilience among Military-Affiliated Students: A Mixed-Methods Investigation

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Abstract
This study explores the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and academic resilience among military-affiliated students in Nigeria. Drawing on theories of resilience and emotional intelligence, the research employs a concurrent mixed-methods design to examine how EI competencies—emotional perception, regulation, understanding, and facilitation—predict resilience in academic settings characterized by discipline, structure, and stress. Quantitative data were collected from 320 cadets and officer trainees using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). Qualitative insights were obtained through semi-structured interviews with 25 students and 10 instructors. Results indicate a strong positive correlation between EI and academic resilience ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$ $r=0.67, p<0.001$), with emotional regulation emerging as the most significant predictor. Thematic analysis revealed that structured military training enhances resilience through discipline, peer support, and leadership exposure, but may also suppress emotional expression. The study concludes by proposing an Emotionally Intelligent Resilience Framework (EIRF) for military education systems to foster both academic success and psychological well-being.

I. Introduction

Military-affiliated students—including cadets, officer trainees, and students in military schools—operate within unique educational ecosystems that combine academic rigor with regimented discipline, physical training, and leadership development. These environments, while structured to build character and competence, can also generate significant academic and psychological stress (Rao et al., 2024). In such contexts, academic resilience—the capacity to maintain or regain academic performance despite adversity—becomes a critical determinant of success. Parallelly, emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively, has been linked to better stress management, interpersonal relationships, and adaptive coping (Mayer et al., 2002). Recent studies suggest that EI not only supports general resilience but may be particularly salient in high-stakes, hierarchical settings such as military training institutions (Rao et al., 2024; Sarrionandia et al., 2018).

Despite growing interest in resilience and EI in educational psychology, few studies have examined their interplay within military academic contexts, especially in Africa. This study addresses this gap by investigating the relationship between EI and academic resilience among Nigerian military-affiliated students. The research questions guiding this study are:

I. What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic resilience among military-affiliated students?
II. Which EI competencies most strongly predict academic resilience?
III. How do military training structures influence the development of EI and resilience?

II. Theoretical Framework

The study integrates two key theoretical models:

Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001): Views resilience as a dynamic process involving positive adaptation within contexts of significant adversity. In academic settings, this includes overcoming failure, managing workload, and persisting toward goals.

Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997): Conceptualizes EI as a set of four interrelated abilities: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions.

These frameworks inform the hypothesis that EI serves as a foundational competency that enhances resilience by improving stress appraisal, coping flexibility, and social support utilization.

III. Methodology

A concurrent mixed-methods design was employed, with quantitative and qualitative data collected simultaneously and integrated during analysis.

Participants

Quantitative: 320 military-affiliated students (240 male, 80 female) from the Nigerian Army School of Education and allied institutions.

Qualitative: 25 students and 10 instructors purposively selected for interviews.

Instruments

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25) (Connor & Davidson, 2003): Assesses resilience.

MSCEIT (Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test) (Mayer et al., 2002): Measures four EI branches. Semi-structured interview guides exploring experiences of stress, coping, and emotion regulation in military academic life.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained. Participants completed informed consent and paper-based questionnaires during scheduled training sessions. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and anonymized.

IV. Results and Data Analysis

Quantitative: Pearson's correlation, multiple regression.

Qualitative: Thematic analysis using NVivo 12.

4.1 Findings

1. Quantitative Results

A strong positive correlation was found between total EI score and academic resilience (

$r = 0.67,$

$p < 0.001$

$r=0.67, p<0.001$). Regression analysis indicated that emotional regulation (

$\beta = 0.42$

$\beta=0.42$) and emotional understanding ($\beta=0.28$

$\beta=0.28$) were the strongest predictors of resilience.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of EI Branches and Resilience Scores

EI Branch	Resilience Score (CD-RISC)
Emotional Perception	0.51*
Emotional Facilitation	0.48*
Emotional Understanding	0.60*
Emotional Regulation	0.65*
Total EI	0.67*

*Note: p < 0.01

4.2 Qualitative Themes

Theme 1: Discipline as a Double-Edged Sword – Military structure fosters persistence but may discourage emotional expression.

Theme 2: Peer Bonds as Resilience Buffers – Strong peer networks provide emotional and academic support.

Theme 3: Leadership Exposure Builds Emotional Insight – Leadership tasks enhance emotional awareness and regulation.

Figure 1: Proposed Emotionally Intelligent Resilience Framework (EIRF) for Military Education

V.   Discussion

This study demonstrates that emotional intelligence is a significant correlate and predictor of academic resilience among military-affiliated students. The findings align with Rao et al. (2024), who noted that EI enhances coping and adaptive functioning under stress. In military academic contexts, where stressors are both academic and systemic, the ability to regulate emotions may be particularly protective. Notably, the qualitative data reveal a tension between the military's emphasis on discipline and the emotional flexibility required for resilience. While structure fosters persistence, it may also inhibit emotional expression—a potential risk factor for psychological distress if not balanced with EI training. The proposed Emotionally Intelligent Resilience Framework (EIRF) integrates EI skill-building into existing military training modules, emphasizing emotion regulation, peer mentoring, and reflective practice. This model aligns with global trends in resilience education but is tailored to the cultural and structural realities of Nigerian military institutions.

5.1 Recommendations

Integrate EI training into the military education curriculum.
Train instructors in emotion-coaching and resilience-facilitation skills.
Establish peer mentoring programs to strengthen social support networks.
Conduct longitudinal studies to track EI and resilience development over time.
Develop context-specific assessment tools for military student populations.

VI.   Conclusion

Emotional intelligence is a foundational asset for academic resilience in military-affiliated students. By fostering EI competencies—especially emotional regulation and understanding—military educational institutions can enhance not only academic outcomes but also the psychological well-being and leadership potential of their students. The EIRF provides a practical, evidence-informed roadmap for achieving this integration, contributing to the broader discourse on resilience in specialized educational settings.

Acknowledgement

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