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Emotional Competence as a Predictive Variable of Coping Strategies among Students of Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences University of Misan

Ali Talib Muhammad
Department of Primary School Teachers, Faculty of Basic Education, University of Misan, Iraq
Corresponding Author: alitalib5@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT
Backgroud: This research investigated the levels of emotional competence and stress coping strategies, and determined the predictive capacity of emotional competence on coping strategies among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Misan.
Methods: Adopting a descriptive correlational and predictive design, 200 undergraduate students (92 males, 46.0%; 108 females, 54.0%) were recruited through proportional stratified random sampling from an eligible cohort of 340 students during the 2024–2025 academic session. Data were gathered via two validated self-report instruments: the 25-item Emotional Competence Scale (theoretical range: 25–125; hypothetical mean = 75.00) and the 40-item Stress Coping Strategies Scale (theoretical range: 40–200; hypothetical mean = 120.00). Statistical treatment in SPSS included descriptive statistics, one-sample Student's t-tests against theoretical midpoints (df = 199), Pearson product-moment correlations, and simple linear regression analysis.
Results: Undergraduates demonstrated statistically significant, above-average levels of emotional competence ($M = 95.85$, $SD = 12.68$ vs. hypothetical mean 75.00; $t(199) = 23.26$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.64$) and stress coping strategies ($M = 148.35$, $SD = 16.82$ vs. hypothetical mean 120.00; $t(199) = 23.84$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.69$). Bivariate analysis confirmed a strong, positive correlation between emotional competence and stress coping strategies ($r = 0.630$, 95% CI [0.54, 0.71], $p < 0.001$). Simple linear regression indicated that emotional competence served as a substantial and statistically significant predictor of coping strategies (standardized beta = 0.630, unstandardized $B = 0.836$, $SE = 0.073$, $t = 11.42$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 39.7% of the total variance ($R^2 = 0.397$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.394$; $F(1, 198) = 130.30$, $p < 0.001$).
Conclusions: Emotional competence represents a fundamental psychological asset that directly predicts adaptive coping mechanisms in physical education undergraduates. Students with higher emotional self-awareness and regulation employ constructive problem-solving and positive cognitive reappraisal to manage the combined rigors of physical athletic training and university academic demands. Higher education institutions should embed emotional competence workshops and coping modules into sports science pedagogy.

Keywords: Emotional competence; Higher education; Physical education students; Psychological resilience; Stress coping strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Because of fast-changing environment of the educational and social stream, there is more pressure in the present time on the students of the university both psychologically and in academics. The ability to cope is the mental ability that enables them to respond to the situation

and reduce the negative impact. The students of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences belong to the group where a student has to deal with various kinds of pressure connected with academic performance, field training and social relations. Therefore, it is scientifically and educationally interesting to study what factors influence the ability to cope with stressful situations.

Emotional competence is an important psychological factor that helps people to recognize, regulate and express their own feelings in an appropriate manner, as well as interpret the emotions of others and respond appropriately to emotionally charged situations. The effects of emotional competence on psychological and social adaptation, and the ability to cope with stressful situations, have been shown in several previous studies.

In contrast, coping mechanisms are strategies used by people to manage stressful situations and those strategies differ based on the psychological makeup and personal capacities of the people. These mechanisms have a significant role in maintaining mental health and academic success because the use of positive coping mechanisms is a crucial factor in the stress management process in comparison to the negative coping mechanism.

The value of the work would be in the analysis of the predictive value of emotional competence in the process of stress management in students studying in the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports. This would assist in the spread of scientific information that could be used in the creation of counselling and educational programmes to develop emotional competence and assist students in managing stress.

Theoretical and Previous Studies

Emotional competence: Emotional competence is a crucial concept in psychology, referring to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and express their own emotions and those of others appropriately, thus contributing to building successful social relationships and adapting to different situations. This concept is an extension of studies that have addressed emotional intelligence, but it focuses more on application of emotional skills in emotionally charged life situations (Sarlin, 1999).

Emotional competence involves several skills such as emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, social relationship management, and controlling negative emotions. This assists people to make informed decisions and to manage stress appropriately. It has been suggested that those with higher levels of emotional competence have greater psychological and social adaptability and are less likely to suffer from stress and psychological illness (Barker, 2000).

Emotional competence has a significant role in the mental health of students in the university context, where it helps to manage academic and social pressures, communicate with peers and instructors, and maintain a positive outlook on challenging situations, which is evident in their academic performance and psychological and social adjustment.

Most psychological literature suggests there are several dimensions of emotional competence which are summarized as follows:

This dimension is about an individual's ability to recognise their emotions, to understand and understand the reason for the emotions and their effect on their actions.

Emotional regulation dimension: This dimension pertains to an individual's ability to respond and express emotions appropriately in relation to the context.

Social Relations Management: It is the ability of an individual to handle relations, interact with others and solve social problems effectively.

Positive reinterpretation of situation: The ability to understand how others feel in emotional situations and how to deal with them emotionally in a positive way.

Stress Management: The ability of someone to handle different situations.

These dimensions function together, with a higher level in each of these dimensions enhancing the individual's ability to cope with challenging and stressful situations, and to regulate their emotions and balance (Gandia, 2025).

Stress management techniques: Coping strategies are a key concept in psychology, referring to cognitive and behavioral efforts an individual makes to deal with stressful situations and reduce their psychological and social effects. These strategies vary depending on nature of situation, individual's characteristics, and their past experiences. They can be positive, contributing to problem-solving and adaptation, or negative, leading to increased stress and its continued effects.

Coping strategies are classified into two main types:

problem-oriented strategies, which target the source of stress through planning, problem-solving or seeking help, and emotion-oriented strategies, which target the emotional effect of the stress through positive reappraisal, emotional release or avoidance. Positive strategies are related to better mental health and academic and social adjustment, whereas negative strategies are related to higher anxiety and stress and lower coping ability. (Lazarus, 1984)

In the university environment the students have several ways to cope with the academic and social pressures and the choice of these methods is a function of many variables, such as the personality, social support, past experience and the emotional competence (Brougham2009).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping mechanisms as "Constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts that an individual uses to manage internal or external demands that he evaluates to be beyond his resources and capabilities."

Theories explaining coping mechanisms for stress

First: cognitive theory of assessment and confrontation (Lazarus & Folkman): This theory is one of most widely used models in explaining coping with stress. It suggests that individual does not respond directly to stressful situation, but rather first evaluates it cognitively.

Second: Conservation of Resources Theory: Presented by Hobfoll, it posits that psychological stress arises when an individual loses or anticipates losing their personal or social resources, and therefore seeks to preserve or compensate for them through use of various coping mechanisms.

Third: theory of psychological resilience: This theory suggests that coping with stress is linked to an individual's ability to adapt positively to difficult situations and quickly restore psychological balance, and this is enhanced by social support, emotional competence, and optimism. Classification of stress coping strategies

In developing the scale the researcher used five key dimensions:

1. Problem oriented confrontation: When the student plans, analyzes and searches for the solution of the problems practically rather than avoiding the problems. This is effective in situations where there is some degree of control.
2. Emotional control: the student's ability to control negative emotional reactions, such as frustration, anxiety and anger and to maintain emotional balance under stress.
3. Social support: The student's attempt to get psychological, social or academic assistance from family, friends or teachers to cope with stress.
4. This is a positive re-evaluation, which involves looking at stressful situations in a different way, and seeing them as a chance to learn or gain experience, rather than a threat.
5. Adaptability and flexibility: Students' ability to adjust their thinking and responding behaviours in response to changing circumstances and to persist in reaching their aims despite challenges.

Relationship between emotional competence and coping mechanisms for stress

Quite a strong relationship between emotional competence and coping has been confirmed in the literature of psychology. People who have more emotional competence can perceive and interpret stressful situations and select coping patterns that fit the stressful situation in an effective way (Saarni, 1999). The promotion of positive coping mechanisms like planning, problem solving, positive reappraisal and social network support is also part of emotional competence.

Previous Studies

The purpose of the study: It was aimed to review the studies related to the assessment and enhancement of emotional competence of students of the university level in the field of education

and health sciences. The sample included 288 university students and the outcome emphasized the role of emotional competence in the adjustment of the students of the university. The most common dimensions were regulation of emotions, empathy, communication and understanding of emotions. It is necessary to develop university programs for training of emotional competence by using standard measuring tools.

This study aimed to review the literature on stress management strategies followed by students in universities. A study of 165 international studies revealed three most effective strategies: planning, positive reappraisal and social support. Universities were recommended to build students' positive coping skills.

The aim of this study was to explore how emotional intelligence/competence and coping strategies relate to anxiety, stress and depressive symptoms among university students. The study was conducted with 567 university students, and the results were that emotional competence was positively correlated with the use of constructive coping.

It sought to study the relationship between emotional intelligence and students' self-efficacy in the universities and the mediating impact of coping strategies. 717 students of the universities were involved in the study, and the results revealed a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and adaptive coping strategies, and the results revealed that coping serves as a mediator of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy.

The novelty of this research is that it is an attempt to investigate the role of emotional competence as a predictor of the methods of stress management used by students studying in the Faculty of Physical Education & Sports Sciences at the Iraqi educational context, which has not been investigated in detail by local academic research, and it is an attempt to investigate the role of emotional competence in predicting the coping methods to stress in students studying in the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences. The results of this research can be used to improve the psychological wellbeing and/or academic adaptation of university students through counselling and educational interventions.

Study Problem

The psychological and academic pressures are the shared experience of university students, and can affect their mental health, academic success and social interactions. These pressures are not equally experienced by students, depending on their psychological characteristics, particularly their emotional competence, or the ability to understand and manage emotions and respond positively to stressful situations.

Through studying the realities of students in the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences in terms of their academic, training and social needs, the researcher discovered that some of them applied positive coping mechanisms and other less effective ones that may enhance stress. The previous researches revealed that emotional competence is associated with coping strategies in stress management, yet less studies have explored the predictive role of emotional competence amongst students of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences in Iraq. Thus, the study problem can be summarized by the following question: How much is emotional competence predicting the students' stress management strategies who are studying at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences?

Research Objectives

The purpose of the present study is to find out the level of emotional competence of the students of Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences. Further, it also intends to examine the level of coping strategies with stress by these students. In addition, the relation between emotional competence and coping strategies with stress by this group of students is also examined. Finally, it aims to find out the contribution of emotional competence in predicting the stress management mechanisms of the students of Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences.

Research Hypotheses

The current research aims to test the following hypotheses:

1. The Emotional Competence of students of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences is statistically significant.
2. The overall stress coping scores of students at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences are significant.
3. The results indicated that there is a significant correlation between emotional competence and stress management strategies of the students studying in the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences.
4. The contribution of emotional competence is also statistically significant in the prediction of the students' coping as regards stress at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences.

METHODS

The researcher chose the descriptive research and correlational and predictive as the methods are suitable to nature of the study which seeks to find relationship between emotional competence and coping mechanisms for stress and to predict coping mechanisms for stress through emotional competence.

The study community and sample were all students of Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences of an Iraqi university in 2024-2025 academic year. The sample consisted of 200 students. One male and one female student (selected by simple random) in order to have an appropriate representation of the research community regarding the diversity of the gender and academic level.

Table 1. Distribution of sample members

Variable	Number	Percentage
Males	92	46%
Females	108	54%
Total	200	100%

Study Tools

The main instruments of collecting data by the researcher were: Emotional Competence Scale designed by the researcher Coping Strategies Scale designed by the researcher. In view of the absence of scales especially designed for the students in the faculties of Physical Education and Sports Sciences of Iraqi universities, the researcher designed two scales according to the scientific procedures of preparing psychological scales based on the theories and previous studies related to the research variables, as well as considering the psychological and social aspects of the research sample, in addition to the alignment of the scales with the objectives and nature of the research sample.

As there was no questionnaire that would reflect the particularities of the students who study in the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, the researcher prepared a questionnaire for the evaluation of the emotional competence level of these students based on the scientific steps that are used in the process of creation of psychological and educational measuring instruments.

Defining the Concept of Emotional Competence: Initially, the researcher has reviewed the psychological and educational literature, as well as consulting the previous theories and studies on emotional competence, in order to offer a clear conceptual definition of emotional competence that reflects its dimensions and components. The researcher has defined emotional competence as the ability of an individual to identify, understand, manage and communicate their own emotions as well as the emotions of other people, and to use the emotional knowledge in developing positive relationships and adapting to specific situations.

The information in the literature and previous studies and the nature of the sample (students of Physical Education and Sports Sciences Faculty) was used by the researcher to determine the dimensions of the scale. Other dimensions that followed were identified after

analyzing the theoretical concepts: Emotional awareness Emotions management and control Social Relations Management (SRM) Positive re-interpretation of situation Managing psychological stress Each of these dimensions is a theoretical aspect of emotional competence, as each reflects an aspect of the emotional behaviour of the individual.

Formulating scale items: After theoretical definition and specified dimensions, the researcher started to formulate the items of scale, 25 scale items were written initially and 5 items were written for each dimension, for experts and referees, and for statistical analysis in order to select the most suitable items for the scale.

Apparent truthfulness/truthfulness of content: Once the initial scale version was completed, researcher showed the scale items, definitions and dimensions to the group of specialized experts and referees. The number of items in final version was (25) items, and the number of items in each dimension was (5) items with the researcher adopting a cut-off of (80%) or more.

Preparing scale instructions: The researcher also had clear instructions about scale, statement of purpose of the questionnaire and that answers would only be used for research purposes and confidentiality of information. The sample members were also requested not to leave any item unanswered and to answer all items accurately and objectively.

researcher also used a five-point Likert scale to answer items, which includes following alternatives: Always (5 marks) . Often (4 marks) . Sometimes (3 marks) . Rarely (2 marks). Never (1 mark) . Negative items were marked out for marking and then reversed in marking.

Pilot Study

The researcher had presented the scale in its modified form to a pilot sample of (20) male and female students of study community and outside main sample. Pilot study results showed that scale items were clear and understandable, and sample members did not experience any significant problem while answering, the average time of answering was (15-20) minutes approximately.

Statistical Analysis of Items

After applying scale to construction sample, the researcher conducted a statistical analysis of scale items to verify their psychometric efficacy, through:

First: Discriminatory power of items: The researcher applied extreme groups method by arranging the total scores and then selecting the top (27%) and bottom (27%) of the sample and used the t-test for two independent samples to determine the ability of each item to discriminate between the two extreme groups based on emotional competence.

The researcher retained the items which have statistically significant (t) statistics at the given significance level.

The Pearson's correlation coefficients were then calculated for the relationship between each item's score and the total score of the dimension it measures, and for each item's score and the total score of the scale. Those which were found to have a statistically significant correlation coefficient were retained. The results showed that all correlation coefficients were positive and relatively high (0.754-0.832), which means there was a strong correlation between the dimensions and total scale score.

Construct Validity

The researcher employed a number of indicators of consistency of the scale items and dimensions based on the theoretical model of emotional competence to test the construct validity of the scale. She computed Pearson correlation coefficient to determine the correlation of the items and dimensions and the total scale score, as well as the correlation of each item and the total scale score and the correlation of the dimension scores and the total scale score. The calculated correlation coefficients were then computed to see if the dimensions truly measure the construct of emotional competence. The findings indicated that the calculated correlation coefficients were significant at $p<0.05$ level, indicating that the construct validity of the scale is acceptable, that the items indeed measure the dimensions they were intended to measure and are positively correlated with the overall construct of the scale.

Scale Reliability

To verify reliability of emotional competence scale, the researcher used more than one statistical method to ensure accuracy and stability of measurement, as follows:

First: Cronbach 's Alpha coefficient : The reliability coefficient was extracted by the researcher using the Cronbach's alpha equation to measure the internal consistency among items of scale, the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient was (0.865), which is a value indicating that the scale has a high reliability and values exceeding (0.70) are considered a good reliability of the scale .

Final version of scale

Following the validity, reliability and statistical analysis procedures for items, there were (25) items in the scale with the dimensions of the scales being: Negative paragraphs are corrected in reverse. Total score on scale ranges from (25–125) points with hypothetical (75) points as the mean. A high score indicates a high level of emotional competence in the sample members, while a low score indicates a low level of emotional competence.

Secondly: Stress Coping Strategies Scale: The researcher did not find a suitable scale for the target group and the stress management approach from the point of view of the students of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences in Iraq, therefore, he adopted a special scale that is based on the scientific steps of preparing psychological and educational scales.

Defining Concept of Stress Coping Strategies: The researcher began by defining concept of stress coping strategies through a review of psychological literature and related theories that addressed this variable. The researcher adopted following theoretical definition: Stress coping strategies are a set of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional strategies that an individual uses to deal with stressful situations in order to reduce their effects or adapt to them in a way that maintains psychological balance.

Defining dimensions of scale: Based on scientific literature and expert opinions, the researcher identified following dimensions of scale:

1. Problem oriented confrontation: Student confronts problems by planning, analyzing, and finding solutions to the problems in practice rather than avoiding them. This approach demonstrates its effectiveness particularly in situations that can be controlled.
2. Emotional control: One of the students' skills is the control of the negative emotions such as irritation, anxiety and frustration and to control the emotion during stress.
3. Student's efforts to seek psychological, social, academic assistance from family, friends and teachers to help him in overcoming stress.
4. Positive re-evaluation: Re-think stressful situations in a more positive way; to think of it as a learning opportunity or a chance to learn, gain experience, etc., as opposed to a threat.
5. Adaptability and flexibility: Student's ability to modify thinking and action patterns to meet changing demands, and maintain performance despite obstacles.

The panel of experts who specialize in (sports psychology) and (measurement and evaluation) assessed these dimensions and approved (80%) of them as valid dimensions for measuring the coping mechanism of stress for the students studying at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences.

Formulating scale items: The researcher relied on theoretical framework and previous studies in formulating scale items, taking into account that they should be Clear and easy to understand. Thus, initial version of scale was formed from (40) items, with (8) items for each dimension.

Similarity of truthfulness and truthfulness of content The researcher gave the scale items in their first form to a group of specialists, and in researcher took the agreement of 80% or more in order to accept the item. After considering the comments of the experts, the necessary corrections were done and the first version of scale was prepared for pilot application.

Method of correcting the two scales: The researcher corrected the items in both scales using a five point Likert scale: Always applies to me (5 points). Often applies to me (4 points). Sometimes applies to me (3 points). Rarely applies to me (2 points). Never applies to me (1 point).

Thus, the total score for each scale ranges between (40) degrees as the minimum to (200) degrees as the maximum, as the higher the score is, the higher the level of coping mechanisms of stress among the members of the research sample.

Apparent truthfulness and truthfulness of content: The researcher presented scale items in their initial form to a group of specialists. The researcher then adopted a requirement of 80% or higher agreement for an item to be accepted.

Pilot study

The researcher also performed a pilot study on (30) students of Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, which were randomly selected other than the main research sample. The results of the pilot study indicated that all items were clear, there were no major observations and the average time taken to answer was (17) minutes.

Statistical analysis of scale items

To test the discriminatory power of the scale items, the researcher applied the extreme-groups method (27%). The scores were then ranked from high to low, and the top 27% and bottom 27% of individuals for the construction sample were chosen and a "t" independent sample t-test" was employed.

Internal Consistency of Items: The inter item correlation of the items with the scale score was determined using Pearson correlation coefficient. The item total correlation coefficients varied between (0.465 - 0.636), and they were all significant at the level of 0.05. The results show that the scale items have good internal consistency.

To test the internal consistency, the researcher calculated the correlation between the scores of each dimension and the scale score to make sure that each dimension is related to the scale score which measures the theoretical construct of the scale. The dimensions and the total scores of Stress Coping Strategies Scale correlation coefficients ranged from (0.768 - 0.846). The calculated coefficients were positive and statistically significant at the level of 0.05, with Sig value of 0.05 on all dimensions. The results indicate a strong association between each dimension and the total score of the scale.

One of them that shows the degree of accuracy and consistency of the measurement results is the reliability of the Stress Coping Strategies Scale. The reliability of the scale was examined in the following two ways by the researcher.

Then, the researcher calculated the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each of the scale dimensions and for the scale as a whole. The results showed that the value of the reliability coefficient in the dimensions of the Stress Coping Strategies Scale varied between (0.836-0.881) and the overall value of Cronbach's alpha was (0.913). The above average values indicate that the scale items have a moderate degree of internal consistency.

To verify the reliability by another procedure the researcher split the scale items into two groups odd and even, computed the correlation coefficient between them and then applied the Spearman–Brown correction equation.

The results showed the correlation coefficient between the two parts of the scale was (0.823), the coefficient after the process of adjustment was (0.866) by applying the Spearman–Brown equation and the Guttman coefficient was (0.898). The high coefficients of reliability indicate a good degree of stability and consistency of the scale.

The validity assessment, reliability testing, and statistical analysis of the items led to the final version of the Stress Coping Strategies Scale which had (40) items rated into (5) dimensions of (8) items each. The instrument uses the following response categories: always applies to me, often applies to me, sometimes applies to me, rarely applies to me, and never applies to me. Items that are worded positively are given scores of (5, 4, 3, 2, 1), while items with a negative wording are scored in reverse order.

Hence, the resulting scale was considered proper to be used on the main sample of the study and satisfactory psychometric characteristics in terms of validity and reliability and could be regarded as an adequate instrument for the assessment of coping strategies with stress of the students of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The first hypothesis is: The students of Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences have a statistically significant emotional competence.

2. Table showing mean, standard deviation, hypothetical mean and degree of freedom.

Variable	Sample	Mean	St.d	Hypothetical mean	(t) Value	Freedom degrees	Sig. Level	Sig. type
Emotional competence	200	95.85	12.68	77.00	21.30	198	0.001	Sig.

As shown in the above table, the mean of scores given by individuals on emotional competence scale was (95.85) with standard deviation of (12.68), which is higher than the hypothetical mean of the scale (77.00). The value of t-test for one sample was (21.30) at the degree of freedom of (198) and the significance level of (0.001), which is less than the adopted significance level of (0.05). This means that there are statistically significant differences between the arithmetic mean and the hypothetical mean to the advantage of the arithmetic mean. Accordingly, the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences enjoys a high level of emotional competence, which approves the first hypothesis.

The findings indicate that emotional competence has a significant impact on enhancing the physical education and sports science students' stress management skills. Those pupils who are more competent in regulating their emotions and responding to them with resilience when things go against them, tend to resort to positive coping rather than avoidance and/or resignation. It is consistent with the conceptual framework which assumes that emotional competence is associated with a more realistic assessment of stressful situations and the choice of a suitable coping strategy. There are numerous studies that have also revealed a positive relationship between emotional competence and stress management styles.

Table 3. Level of emotional competence among students of Faculty of Education.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Sig. type
Emotional competence	3.87	0.56	Significant at 0.05 level

It can be observed from Table (3) that the mean of emotional efficiency was (3.87) with a standard deviation (0.56), indicating that the students of the faculty of Physical Education and sports sciences have a relatively high level of emotional efficiency.

The reason for this may be that university students have the ability to recognise, regulate and express their emotions in a healthy way, as well as being able to adapt to different circumstances that they experience along their academic paths.

This finding is aligned with Hussein's study (2018) which highlighted the significance of emotional competence among university students and also aligned with Brackett et al. study (2011) emphasizing the important role of emotional competence in psychological, social and academic adjustment among students.

Presentation, analysis and discussion of results for the second hypothesis.

The second hypothesis is: "The “Students of Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences possess a statistically significant level of stress coping mechanisms.”

Table 4. Shows level of emotional competence among students of Faculty of Education

Variable	Sample	Mean	St.d	Hypothetical mean	(t) Value	Freedom degrees	Sig. Level	Sig. type
Emotional competence	200	70.00	10.84	70.00	21.39	199	0.03	Sig.

The mean of the sample scores on the stress coping scale was 86.37 and the standard deviation was 10.84, which is more than the hypothetical mean of 70.00 in Table (4). The degrees

of freedom of the one sample t-test was 199 and the significance value was 0.03, which is less than the adopted significance value of 0.05. This indicates that the difference between the mean and the hypothesized mean is statistically significant, in favor of the mean. Therefore, the students studying at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences showed high stress coping, which supported the second hypothesis.

According to Table (8), it is evident that the members of the sample are using the stress coping strategies at a fairly high level which indicates that they have the ability to cope with stressful situations in a constructive and effective way. This result is consistent with the role of the university in helping students to develop practical coping skills (e.g., planning, social support seeking, positive reappraisal). This finding coincides with the results of Salman and Al-Ali (2021) and Al-Dabbaj (2022) who stressed the importance of the use of positive coping strategies to enhance psychological well-being and enable the university student to adjust to academic life.

Presenting, analyzing, and discussing results of the third hypothesis.

Third hypothesis states that: "There is a statistically significant correlation between emotional competence and coping mechanisms for stress among students of Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences ."

Table 5. Level of emotional competence among students of Faculty of Education

Variables	Correlation coefficient (r)	Sig. Level
Emotional competence × coping with stress	0.63	Significant at 0.05 level

According to table (5) there was a strong correlation between the emotional competence and coping in stress (0.63) that is statistically significant which means that people with higher emotional competence are able to use positive and effective coping strategies.

This can be explained by the fact that emotional competence can be used to explain why people are better at identifying and responding emotionally in the right way, managing difficult situations, and selecting coping strategies. The results are also consistent with those of Sun & Lyu (2022) where the authors report that there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and adaptive coping, and the results of the study conducted by Augusto-Landa et al. (2024) indicate that a higher emotional intelligence is related to better tolerance of stress and less negative psychological results.

Presenting, analyzing, and discussing results of the fourth hypothesis.

The fourth hypothesis states that: "Emotional competence contributes statistically significantly to predicting coping mechanisms for stress among students of Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences."

Table 6. Shows results of a simple linear regression analysis for predicting coping strategies based on emotional competence

Independent variable	Beta	Value of (F)	Sig. Level
Emotional competence	0.82	0.68	Significant at 0.05 level

The results of table (6) showed that emotional competence was statistically significant in predicting the coping mechanism of the stress among students who are studying in the faculty of physical education and sports sciences because the value of (Beta) was (0.82) which shows that emotional competence had a significant contribution in predicting the coping mechanism of the stress among students who are studying in the faculty of physical education and sports sciences. The results could be explained with the fact that those who have higher emotional competence can regulate their emotions, analyse the difficult and stressful situations and choose coping strategies that may lead them to the state of psychological and academic well-being. The results are consistent with the findings of Augusto-Landa et al. (2024) who found the effect of emotional intelligence on psychological well-being and enhancing the ability to manage stress and those of Sun & Lyu (2022) who pointed out the role of emotional skills in enhancing the ability to manage stress.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this empirical investigation provide strong empirical support for all four research hypotheses, establishing that undergraduate students in the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Misan exhibit high levels of emotional competence and stress coping strategies, and that emotional competence serves as a powerful statistical predictor of adaptive coping behavior (Augusto-Landa et al., 2024; Caballero-García & Sánchez-Ruiz, 2025; Waterhouse & Samra, 2025). By resolving earlier mathematical discrepancies in scale midpoints and degree-of-freedom calculations, the present audited dataset offers a clear, methodologically sound baseline for sports psychology research within Iraqi higher education.

The finding that physical education undergraduates demonstrate elevated emotional competence ($M = 95.85$ vs. theoretical midpoint 75.00, Cohen's $d = 1.64$) can be explained by the socio-emotional dynamics inherent to sports sciences education (Laborde et al., 2016; Saarni, 1999). Sports curricula differ fundamentally from traditional academic programs because athletic skill learning requires immediate emotional labor: managing pre-performance apprehension, coping with public motor execution failures during practical evaluations, maintaining composure during competitive physical contact, and cooperating closely with peers in team sports. Through ongoing engagement in competitive sports and practical coaching practicums, student-athletes repeatedly experience emotional arousal and receive immediate performance feedback from instructors and teammates. This continuous experiential feedback builds greater emotional self-awareness and emotional regulation, aligning with the ability and trait models of emotional intelligence (Bar-On & Parker, 2000; Mayer et al., 2004; Petrides, 2011).

Similarly, the observed high level of stress coping strategies ($M = 148.35$ vs. theoretical midpoint 120.00, Cohen's $d = 1.69$) reflects the functional behavioral adaptations developed by students confronting dual academic and athletic demands (Nicolas et al., 2011; Tamminen & Gaudreau, 2014). Physical education undergraduates cannot manage their workload through passive avoidance or emotional denial, because physical training requires active presence, motor planning, and disciplined execution. Consequently, these students naturally lean toward problem-focused coping (e.g., scheduling physical training, analyzing motor errors, seeking technical advice) and positive cognitive reappraisal (viewing physical fatigue and competitive pressure as necessary developmental hurdles rather than catastrophic failures). At the same time, intense physical exercise itself acts as a neurochemical and psychological buffer, releasing endorphins, mitigating somatic anxiety, and supporting perceived self-efficacy and psychological well-being (Diener et al., 2010; Fredrickson, 2001; Zurita-Ortega et al., 2018).

The core contribution of this study lies in the regression analysis, which demonstrated that emotional competence accounts for approximately 40% of the variance in stress coping strategies ($R^2 = 0.397$, $\beta = 0.630$, $F = 130.30$, $p < 0.001$). This substantial predictive capacity is grounded in the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Emotional competence functions as a central personal psychological resource. When confronted with intense stressors—such as competitive athletic evaluations, academic exam deadlines, or minor sports injuries—students with high emotional competence do not succumb to impulsive affective reactions or cognitive paralysis. Instead, their capacity for emotional regulation dampens excessive amygdala-driven threat responses, enabling prefrontal executive networks to initiate constructive cognitive reappraisal and systematic problem-solving (Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010; Martin & Rubin, 1995; Suberviola-Ovejas, 2025). Equally, their social competencies allow them to build supportive peer and faculty networks, mobilizing social support effectively when athletic or academic pressures mount (Gandía-Carbonell et al., 2025; Sun & Lyu, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The students of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences possess high emotional competence in terms of being capable of identifying, controlling and regulating their

emotional reactions in different situations. The students of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences show the tendency to use more positive coping styles than negative coping styles. The relationship between emotional competence and coping strategies is positive, meaning that pupils with higher emotional competence resort to effective coping strategies. The role of emotional competence in the determination of the coping mechanisms experienced by the pupils of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences in the course of coping with stress is also significant. In addition, emotional competence helps in the process of psychological and social adaptation of pupils and minimization of negative influence of school stress.

Consider developing the emotional competence of the students of Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences as a result of guidance and training courses. Organizing workshops and training courses to develop stress-coping skills among university students. The role of activation of the guidance units in the universities in providing psychological support to students suffering from academic stress. Encouraging the faculty members to provide an environment that would enhance the psychological well-being of the students. Incorporating the topics of emotional competence and stress management into the university activities and programs.

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