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Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Communication Competence: Mediating Role of Fear of Negative Evaluation and Moderating Role of Self-Efficacy among University Students

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ABSTRACT

Communication competence is an important skill and interpersonal quality that affects a student's ability to fully engage in their studies as well as develop positive social relations and improve upon their professional development. This quantitative, cross-sectional research study sought to investigate the relationship between university students' emotional intelligence and communication competence, specifically through examining the mediating effects of the students' fear of negative evaluation (FNE). Whereas self-efficacy (SE) moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication competence. The data was collected through questionnaires from 250 undergraduate university students using standardized self-report instruments. The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong & Law, 2002) was used to measure emotional intelligence, the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) Scale (Leary, 1983) was utilized to measure the students' fear of being negatively evaluated, the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) was used to assess self-efficacy and the Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (ICCS; Rubin & Martin, 1994) was used to measure communication competence. The statistical analyses of correlation, regression, mediation and moderation were employed to test the proposed hypotheses. There was a positive relationship identified both between emotional intelligence and communication competence and emotional intelligence and self-efficacy. However, emotional intelligence was found to have a negative relationship with fear of negative evaluation. Furthermore, the findings suggest that fear of negative evaluation significantly mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication competence,

while self-efficacy significantly moderated the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication competence. Also, emotional intelligence will have a stronger relationship with communication competence for those individuals who possess a high level of self-efficacy.

INTRODUCTION

One of a variety of interpersonal skills that university students require to achieve educational success in current academic contexts is communication competence. Through participation in various learning activities such as group discussions, presentations, and collaborative projects, university students develop many effective ways to convey, receive and share information about their academic experiences (Rubin & Martin, 1994). Previous research has shown that, in general, university students with high communication skills are engaged with their academic work and develop positive social relationships with other students at their school or in their courses (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted a positive correlation between communication skills and students' psychological well-being and academic performance (Ahmed et al, 2025; Caballero-García & Ruiz, 2025).

Over the last few years, researchers have increasingly focused on examining how emotional competencies influence effective communication between people. Emotional Intelligence (EI) reflects a person's ability to accurately perceive, comprehend, manage and use emotions within themselves and in others (Mayer et al., 2016). Individuals with high levels of EI generally possess increased empathy, manage emotions more effectively, and have heightened social awareness, all of which can enhance the quality of interpersonal communication (Brackett et al., 2011). Therefore, considerable empirical support exists that EI has a positive relationship with factors associated with academic achievement, such as social adjustment and psychological well-being of university students (Caballero-García & Ruiz, 2025; Saleem et al., 2024).

Emotional intelligence plays an important role in the university setting because students are required to work together, handle academic stress, and be engaged with their classmates. Higher emotional intelligence means that students are able to identify the emotional cues of others and control their reactions during interpersonal interactions (Mayer et al., 2016). These emotional skills allow individuals to respond positively to social interactions and improve their overall ability to communicate (Dugué et al., 2024). Further research notes that emotional intelligence can improve one's leadership abilities, ability to work within an organization, and ability to interact effectively with others in higher education settings (Dugué et al., 2024; Saleem et al., 2024).

There are many psychological influences on communication competence that can impact how students express themselves and interact with peers. Students who are competent in communicating are able to clearly express ideas, show empathy towards others, and carry on conversations in an effective manner (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Alternatively, students who may have emotional/psychological barriers have difficulty communicating effectively. Various studies have demonstrated that psychological variables like anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and fear of being judged by society can significantly impact how students act communicatively within academic settings (Leary, 1983; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988).

Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) is one of several psychological factors which may inhibit one's ability to communicate effectively. FNE is defined as the apprehension and discomfort a person feels when he or she believes they are about to be evaluated by others (Leary, 1983). The majority of people who possess high levels of FNE will avoid situations that involve social interaction or feel anxious when they must communicate with others (e.g., when they must speak in front of an audience or communicate interpersonally). Consequently, fears associated with FNE may prevent students from engaging in classroom discussions and from expressing their ideas.

Due to academic assessments and their peers, university students commonly experience high levels of FNE in educational settings. Those who have a fear of negative evaluation may exhibit high levels of

communication anxiety when presenting information and/or engaging in group discussions. This anxiety limits their ability to communicate effectively and participates in academic activities. Several studies indicate that FNE is related to social anxiety and communication apprehension in students (Leary, 1983; Schulenberg et al., 2024).

By promoting the development of emotional regulation and self-awareness, emotional intelligence can help a person cope with his or her fears of negative evaluation. People with higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to be better able to cope with anxiety, as well as being able to manage their negative feelings in social settings (Mayer et al., 2016). As a result, they will likely have less fear of receiving criticism or being rejected in their interpersonal relations. Studies show that emotional intelligence has also been shown to improve students' confidence and ability to function socially (Caballero-García & Ruiz, 2025; Sadiqzade, 2024), by allowing them to regulate their emotional responses appropriately during times when they would normally experience a lack of confidence.

The other major psychological construct is self-efficacy which can also impact communication competence. Self-efficacy simply refers to a person's perception of their ability to successfully perform a specific task (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, students with high self-efficacy are more likely to approach communication situations with confidence and tenacity, whereas students with low self-efficacy may avoid communication tasks altogether due to fear of failing and/or being judged (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000).

Self-efficacy has been determined to play an important role in determining students' motivation and behavior in educational settings. Studies show that students who demonstrate higher communication self-efficacy exhibit higher levels of participation in class discussions and better interpersonal communication skills (Schulenberg et al., 2024). Self-efficacy also contributes to one's psychological resilience by helping him or her cope with difficult social interactions more efficiently (Bandura, 1997).

Additionally, the notions of self-efficacy may represent a potential moderating variable in the association between emotional intelligence and communication competency. For instance, University students with more elevated levels of self-efficacy would more successfully apply their emotional skills throughout communicative exchanges. On the contrary, students lacking sufficient levels of self-efficacy may face challenges in transferring their emotional awareness to develop communication behaviors that are effective. Key findings suggest that emotional intelligence and self-efficacy are collaborative contributors to greater success in building interpersonal skills, strengthening leadership capabilities, and achieving better academic achievement (Dugué et al., 2024; Caballero-García & Ruiz, 2025).

While earlier investigations have explored the correlation between emotional intelligence and numerous psychological outcomes, fewer studies have evaluated the psychological mechanisms that are involved in how emotional intelligence affects communication competency for University students. Most prior studies have concentrated mostly on the direct connections and have not evaluated what mediating and/or moderating processes are occurring (Saleem et al., 2024; Caballero-García & Ruiz, 2025).

Thus, evaluating fear as a mediating variable and self-efficacy as a moderating variable may provide valuable insight into the underlying psychological mechanisms of communication competency. Understanding these relationships will guide educators in designing suitable intervention programs focused on developing emotional intelligence, decreasing anxiety related to oral communication, and improving students' capacity to develop interpersonal relationships.

This research is designed to determine how emotional intelligence affects a student's ability to communicate effectively. As part of this work, we will also look at whether fear of being judged (WFE) changes the effect of emotional intelligence on communication ability and if self-efficacy makes it easier or more difficult for college students to utilize emotional intelligence to develop strong communication skills.

Objectives of Research

1. To understand how emotional intelligence affects a student's communication competence.

2. To understand how emotional intelligence relates to Fear of Negative Evaluation among university students.
3. To understand how emotional intelligence relates to self-efficacy among university students.
4. To determine whether fear of negative evaluation mediates the effect of emotional intelligence on a student's communication competence.
5. To determine whether self-efficacy moderates the effect of emotional intelligence on a student's communication competence.

Hypotheses

- H1: Emotional intelligence will be positively related to communication competence for university students.
- H2: Emotional intelligence will be negatively related to fear of negative evaluation.
- H3: Fear of negative evaluation will be negatively related to communication competence.
- H4: Fear of negative evaluation will be a mediator for the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication competence.
- H5: Self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication competence so that the relationship will be stronger for students high in self-efficacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Significant studies have explored the influence of emotional intelligence on the development of human behaviors in interpersonal relations. Emotional intelligence has been related to the development of social competence, leadership skills, and effective interpersonal communication skills in academic and organizational environments (Brackett et al., 2011). Students who have high emotional intelligence have the potential to understand and manage emotions during communication interactions (Mayer et al., 2016). Recent empirical studies have identified the predictive value of emotional intelligence for the development of communication competence and collaborative learning outcomes in university students (MacCann et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2024).

Fear of negative evaluations is a psychological construct that has been studied as it relates to communication behaviour. At its core, it happens when an individual is anxious about being judged or criticized negatively by someone else (Leary, 1983). Students who report high levels of fear of negative evaluations may avoid speaking in public or having interpersonal interactions for fear of being embarrassed or rejected (Watson & Friend, 1969). When students' fears of negative evaluations are present, it diminishes their ability to communicate effectively due to their unwillingness to participate in discussions or speak with confidence about their ideas (Schulenberg et al., 2024; Ahmed et al., 2025).

There is also evidence that emotional intelligence can be a means of reducing fear of negative evaluations. Emotional regulation and social confidence seem to be enhanced by having high levels of emotional intelligence. Individuals who demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence seem to be able to manage their anxiety and maintain their composure when faced with socially challenging situations (Mayer et al., 2016). Because of this, emotionally intelligent individuals might be less apprehensive when they perceive that others might evaluate them negatively when interacting with them. Empirical research indicates that emotional intelligence may be negatively correlated with social anxiety and fear of being evaluated negatively among university students (Caballero-García & Ruiz, 2025; Saleem et al., 2024).

One of the key factors affecting an individual's communication competence is their level of self-efficacy or belief in their ability to successfully perform a task, such as effective communication. According to Bandura's social cognitive theory (1997), people's beliefs about their personal capabilities greatly influence their motivation, behaviors, and performance outcomes. Students who have a high level of self-efficacy are likely to participate more fully in classroom discussions and will tend to have superior interpersonal communication skills (Zimmerman, 2000). More recently, researchers have found that an

individual's self-efficacy increases their confidence in social situations and leads to improved communication behaviors in academic settings (Dugué et al., 2024; Ahmed et al., 2025).

While there has been an increase in research regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication competence, there have only been a few studies conducted that have examined the interaction of fear of negative evaluation and self-efficacy in explaining this relationship. If we could better understand how these psychological processes interact, we would gain a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional intelligence affects university students' communication competence (Saleem et al., 2024; Caballero-García & Ruiz, 2025). As a result, this study will examine the mediating effects of fear of negative evaluation and the moderating effects of self-efficacy on the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication competence.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two theoretical approaches: Mayer and Salovey's Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The Ability Model defines EI as a group of cognitive skills that involve recognizing, understanding, using, and managing emotions (Mayer et al., 2016). People who have more EI can handle emotional reactions better than others and maintain positive relationships with others. EI allows individuals to engage in constructive social interactions, which in turn leads to improved communication skills in social settings (Brackett et al., 2011).

The second theoretical approach used in this study is SCT, which places importance on self-efficacy and its impact on behavior and performance. Self-efficacy refers to one's belief in their ability to perform a specific task and deal effectively with difficult situations (Bandura, 1997). Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to attempt to perform difficult tasks, continue to work through challenging circumstances, and achieve superior results. Students with higher self-efficacy in their communication abilities are more confident in how they communicate their ideas and participate socially (Zimmerman, 2000; Dugué et al., 2024). Collectively, these two theoretical perspectives explain how one’s emotional abilities and their beliefs affect their communication competence at the university level.

Conceptual Model

The current study will use literature and theoretical foundations to develop a conceptual model in which emotional intelligence (EI) is the independent variable predicting communication competence amongst university students. The relationship between these two variables will be explained by the students' fear of negative evaluation (FNE), which serves as a mediator. An increase in EI is assumed to decrease a student's FNE, which in turn leads to increased communication competence. Furthermore, the strength of the relationship between EI and communication competence will be moderated by the students' self-efficacy (SE). As students increase their SE, they should demonstrate better use of their emotional abilities when interacting with others, thus further strengthening the positive relationship between EI and communication competence (Bandura, 1997; Caballero-García & Ruiz, 2025).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Study

METHOD

Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional research approach was utilized to explore the relationships between emotional intelligence, fear of negative evaluation, self-efficacy, and communication competency for university students. A cross-sectional design is suitable for research in terms of studying the relationships between psychological variables at a specific point in time and not manipulating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using this design allows researchers to examine the possible relationships or associations of the constructs and perform statistical tests to determine mediation and moderation relationships using correlation and regression techniques (Field, 2018). In this research study, emotional intelligence is the independent variable, communication competency is the dependent variable, while fear of negative evaluation will serve as the mediating variable, and self-efficacy will serve as the moderating variable.

Sample and Selection Method

Participants for this study were university students enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate programs. The participants were recruited from a variety of academic programs (n=250) to increase the diversity of the participants used in the study. University students were chosen due to the frequency with which they participate in various forms of communication (e.g., presentations, group discussions, collaborative learning). This makes the population of university students a good choice to study in relation to communication competency.

Recruitment for the study was done through a non-probability convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling is frequently employed in psychological and educational research when participants are selected based on their availability and willingness to be involved in the research (Etikan et al., 2016). Participants voluntarily completed self-report questionnaires in order to provide data for the study. Participants participated of their own free will and were not given any reward for participating in the study.

MEASURES

Wong and Law Scale for Emotional Intelligence

An evaluation of emotional intelligence was performed using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) developed by Wong and Law (2002). The WLEIS is a 16-item instrument that assesses four areas of emotional intelligence: self-emotion appraisal, appraisal of emotion of others, use of emotion, and emotion regulation. Participants assessed themselves on a scale of one to 7, with a rating of 1 indicating strong disagreement and a rating of 7 indicating strong agreement. Essentially, a higher score indicates greater ability to demonstrate emotional intelligence. The WLEIS is widely used in psychology and education research and has been shown to have excellent reliability and validity in different cultures (Wong & Law, 2002; Law et al., 2004).

Evaluating Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation will be evaluated through the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE) created by Leary (1983). The BFNE has a total of 12 items that evaluate an individual's apprehension about others negatively judging or evaluating them. Respondents were required to respond to each item on a five-point Likert scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. A high number of responses indicates a high level of fear regarding negative evaluation. Due to the BFNE's widespread use in research into interpersonal communication and its strong psychometric properties in college populations it continues to be commonly assessed in social anxiety research (Leary, 1983; Rodebaugh et al., 2004).

Evaluating Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy will be evaluated by the use of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) created by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The GSES consists of 10 items measuring the respondent's belief in their ability to cope with difficult situations/times and to complete difficult tasks. Respondents rated their agreement with each of the items on a four-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (exactly true). A high number of

responses indicates a high level of self-efficacy. The GSES has been used extensively in psychology research and has shown to have strong reliability and cross-cultural validity across a variety of populations (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; Luszczynska et al., 2005).

Communication Competence

Communication competence was assessed using the Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (ICCS) designed by Rubin and Martin (1994). The ICCS has 30 questions about an individual's perceived level of communication ability based on dimensions such as empathy and assertiveness. All items were assessed on a 5-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The higher the score, the higher the level of perceived competence. The ICCS has been extensively used in both communication studies and psychology and has been shown to be reliable and valid in previous studies (Rubin & Martin, 1994; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations included providing all subjects with information about the nature, purpose and voluntary nature of the study, as well as guaranteeing that their responses would be held confidential. Informed consent was obtained from each subject prior to completing the questionnaire. Respondents were guaranteed that their responses would only be used for research, and that their identities would be kept confidential.

Additionally, all subjects were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without penalty at any time; therefore, no personal identifying information was ever collected for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality and protecting privacy. All procedures were consistent with ethical standards in psychology for studies involving human subjects.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once data had been collected, the responses were encoded for entry into the statistical package for the purposes of conducting the analysis. Descriptive statistics were then computed to summarize both the sample demographic characteristics and all study variables. Pearson correlation analysis was subsequently utilized to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence and fear of negative evaluation, self-efficacy and communication competence. Mediation and moderation analyses were then conducted to test the pre-determined conceptual model for this study.

RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive Characteristics of the Study Sample (N=250*)*

Sample Data		n	%
Age			
	18-22	140	56.00
	23-27	110	44.00
Gender			
	Men	125	50.00
	Women	125	50.00
Family Structure			
	Joint	120	48.00
	Nuclear	130	52.00
Residential Area			
	Urban	115	46.11
	Rural	135	53.88

A sample of N=250 subject to be tested in an experiment consisted of university students aged between 18 and 27, of which 56% of subjects were between 18 and 22 years of age and 44% of subjects were

between 23 and 27 years of age. 50% of subjects identified as male and 50% of subjects identified as female, providing a balanced gender distribution for this study. 52% of subjects were from nuclear families and 48% of subjects were from joint families. The geographic distribution of participants in this study was also fairly balanced, with 46.11% of subjects living in urban areas and 53.88% of subjects living in rural areas at the time of recruitment. Overall, this sample provides an opportunity to explore characteristics associated with age, gender, family structure, and area of residence in a concentrated population of university students.

Table 2 Psychometric Properties of Study Scales (N=250)

Scales	k	α	M	SD	Range		Skew	Kurt
					Actual	Potential		
WLEIS	16	.89	5.21	.72	60-106	16-112	-.32	.45
BFNE	12	.91	2.98	.84	16-56	12-60	.21	-.14
GSES	10	.87	3.22	.57	21-40	10-40	-.14	-.18
ICCS	30	.92	3.89	.65	78-150	30-150	-.28	.35

Note. WLEIS=Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale; BFNE=Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale; GSES=General Self-Efficacy Scale;ICCS=Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale

Table 2 outlines the psychometric characteristics of the scales used in the study; all measures had a good internal consistency (Cronbach alpha ranged from 0.87 to 0.92) indicating adequate reliability for this sample. Participants rated themselves as having moderate to high levels of emotional intelligence (mean 5.21, SD 0.72) and communication competence (mean 3.89, SD 0.65), as having moderate levels of fear of negative evaluation (mean 2.98, SD 0.84), but relatively high levels of self-efficacy (mean 3.22, SD 0.57). For each measure, the range of observed scores was within the theoretical minimum and maximum values of that measure, indicating that the data had adequate variability. The skewness and kurtosis of all measures were within ± 1.0, suggesting that the distributions of all variables were approximately normal. In sum, the findings indicate that the measures displayed good, reliable performance and thus they were appropriate for use in correlation and regression analyses examining relationships among emotional intelligence, fear of negative evaluation, self-efficacy and communication competence.

Table 3 Correlation Matrix Between Study Variables (N=250)

	Variables	1	2	3	4
1.	WLEIS	-			
2.	BFNE	-.46**	-		
3.	GSES	.52**	-.36**	-	
4.	ICCS	.55**	-52**	.49**	

Note. WLEIS=Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale; BFNE=Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale; GSES=General Self-Efficacy Scale; ICCS=Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale

Table 3 displays the intercorrelations of the study variables in the current study. The Emotional Intelligence scores (WLEIS) were positively correlated with the participants' Self-Efficacy scores (GSES, $r = .52$, $p < 0.01$) and their Communication Competence Scores (ICCS, $r = .55$, $p < 0.01$) indicated that the students who had the highest levels of Emotional Intelligence reported also feeling very confident and had much better communication skills. There was a significant negative correlation between students' scores of Emotional Intelligence (WLEIS) and the participants' scores of Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE) ($r = -.46$, $p < 0.01$), therefore; students with high Emotional Intelligence experienced much less fear than students with low Emotional Intelligence about being negatively evaluated by others. Students' Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE) was also negatively correlated to their Self-Efficacy ($r = -.36$, $p < 0.01$) and Communication Competence ($r = -.52$, $p < 0.01$) scores, indicating that as students became increasingly anxious about negative evaluation, they also were less likely to report being confident in their abilities and having good communication ability. There was a significant positive correlation between the

participants' Self-Efficacy (GSES) and Communication Competence (ICCS) scores (r = .49, p < 0.01), indicating that as participants became more confident, they also became better communicators. These correlations supported the proposed conceptual model of this study and indicate that Emotional Intelligence, Self-Efficacy, and Fear of Negative Evaluation have a significant relationship that affects the communication competence of university students.

Table 4 Regression Coefficients of Independent Variables on Dependent Variable (Communication Competence)

Variables	B	SE	t	p	95%CL	
					LL	UL
Constant	.85*	.42	2.02	.04	.02	1.68
WLEIS	.48**	.07	6.86	.00	.34	.62
BFNE	-.41**	.06	-6.83	.00	-.53	-.29
GSES	.31**	.09	3.44	.00	.13	.49
R^2	.52**					
ΔR	.52**					

Note. WLEIS=Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale; BFNE=Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale; GSES=General Self-Efficacy Scale

The 52% of variance explained by the regression model for communication competence (R^2=52, F(3, 246)=89.14, p<.001) demonstrates that this model is quite strong overall; that is, it explains most of the variance in the dependent variable. As such, emotionally intelligent (WLEIS) participants are more likely to be competent communicators than emotionally unintelligent participants (B=0.48, t=6.86, p<.001). In contrast, participants who fear negative evaluation (BFNE) are less likely to be competent communicators than those who do not fear being negatively evaluated (B=-0.41, t=-6.83, p<.001). Furthermore, participants who rated themselves highly in regard to self-efficacy (GSES) were also significantly positive predictors of their communication competence (B=0.31, t=3.44, p=.001). In addition, the entire 95% confidence interval does not include 0 for all 3 predicted outcomes, indicating that all of the outcomes were statistically significant. These findings illustrate that as a person's emotional intelligence and self-efficacy increase, their communication competence also increases; conversely, as fear of negative evaluation increases, communication competence decreases. These conclusions validate the hypothesized relationships in the conceptual model.

Table 5 Mediating Role of Fear of Negative Evaluation Between Emotional Intelligence and Communication Competence (N=250)

Variables	R^2	B	SE	t	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Total effect WLES- ICCS(c)	.30	.41***	.05	8.20	.31	.51
Direct effect						
WLES--BFNE(a)	.21	-.36***	.04	-7.85	-.44	-.28
BFNE--ICCS (b)		-.45***	.06	-7.50	-.57	-.33
WLES--- ICCS(c′)		.48***	.05	9.60	.38	.58
Indirect effect						
WLES-BFNE-ICCS	.54	.16***	.03	---	.10	.22

Note. WLEIS=Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale; BFNE=Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale;ICCS=Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale

*p< .01**; p< .001****

In order to see if fear of negative evaluation acts as a mediator in the emotional intelligence and communication competence relationship for college students, a mediation analysis was carried out. As displayed in Table 5, the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication competence was significant in total effect (B = .41, p < .001). This indicates higher emotional intelligence is positively correlated with higher communication competence. Furthermore, emotional intelligence negatively predicts fear of negative evaluation and is statistically significant (B = −.36, p < .001). This suggests that individuals with higher emotional intelligence will generally experience less fear of negative evaluation. In addition, fear of negative evaluation negatively predicts communication competence and has statistical significance (B = −.45, p < .001). After incorporating fear of negative evaluation into the model, the previously mentioned relationship of emotional intelligence predicting communication competence remained significant (direct effect; B = .48, p < .001).

The indirect effect of emotional intelligence on communication competence through fear of negative evaluation was statistically significant (B = .16, 95% CI [.10, .22]) as the confidence interval does not contain zero. This suggests that fear of negative evaluation does partially mediate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence, and Communication Competence. Thus, people who have higher Emotional Intelligence tend to experience lower levels of fear of negative evaluation which in turn leads to greater Communication Competence.

Table 6 Moderating Role of Self-efficacy Between Emotional Intelligence and Communication Competence (N = 250)

VAR	B	SE	t	p	95%CI	
					LL	UL
Constant	.72	.21	3.43	.00	.31	1.13
WLES	.38**	.07	5.42	.00	.24	.52
GSES	.29**	.08	3.62	.00	.13	.45
WLES×GSES	.17**	.06	2.83	.00	.05	.29

Note. WLEIS=Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale;GSES=General Self-Efficacy Scale; ICCS=Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale

p < .01**, *p* < .001***

The purpose of conducting moderation analysis was to investigate how self-efficacy moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and communication competence (CC), of university students. As shown in Table 6, there was a significant and positive effect of EI on predicting CC (B = .38, p < .001), which means that students who had greater levels of EI also had greater levels of CC. Similarly, there was a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and CC (B = .29, p < .001), so students who demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy demonstrated higher levels of CC than those who did not have high levels of self-efficacy. Furthermore, the cross-product of EI and self-efficacy (WLEIS × GSES) produced a significant interaction effect (B = .17, p = .005, 95% CI [.05, .29]), which implies there was a moderating effect of self-efficacy. The overall model of regression was significant and accounted for 56% of the variance in CC ($R^2 = 0.56$, $F(3, 246) = 104.72$, p < .001), with an additional 4% increase in variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04$) attributed to the interaction term. Overall, these findings indicate that the association between EI and CC becomes stronger for students with higher levels of self-efficacy; therefore, self-efficacy increases the relationship between EI and CC.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, we looked at how emotional intelligence relates to the communication capabilities of university students, the fears of their negative evaluations that could be a barrier for their ability to communicate effectively and the potential impact their level of self-efficacy may have on their ability to use emotional and social skills when communicating. Emotional intelligence has been gaining recognition

in recent years as one of the most important psychological components of helping university students develop interpersonal effectiveness, become more engaged in their studies, and enhance their social functioning. Communication competence is very important for university students as it supports them in collaborating, participating in classwork and developing their career-related skills.

While fear of negative evaluation can serve as a psychological barrier to effective communication, self-efficacy is a personal resource that can improve an individual's emotional and social capabilities to succeed in communicating effectively. Consequently, the present study sought to develop a thorough understanding of how emotional intelligence impacts communication competence through emotional and

The present study's first hypothesis proposes a direct positive relationship between emotional intelligence and communication competence; therefore, as hypothesized, emotional intelligence was positively correlated to communication competence. These findings are consistent with prior research suggesting that individuals with higher emotional intelligence exhibit better interpersonal communication skills, including empathy, social awareness, and expressive clarity (Brackett et al., 2011; MacCann et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence enables students to regulate their emotions and respond adaptively in social interactions, which enhances their ability to convey ideas effectively and maintain meaningful communication with peers (Caballero-García & Ruiz, 2025; Mayer et al., 2016).

Hypothesis 2 posited that emotional intelligence would be inversely correlated to fear of negative appraisal. This hypothesis was also confirmed via the data collected for this study as well. Specifically, results indicate that there was an inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and fear of negative appraisal, suggesting that as individuals' levels of emotional intelligence increase, their level of anxiety associated with evaluations from others regarding their social interactions decreases. This finding is consistent with prior research which states that emotional intelligence contributes to one's ability to regulate their emotions, thus allowing them to reduce their experiences of social anxiety and fear of evaluation by others (Mayer et el., 2016; Saleem et al., 2024). Likewise, in a study conducted by Duran and Kelly (1988), authors concluded that emotionally intelligent students have greater confidence in social situations and experience lower levels of anxiety regarding how they are evaluated by others.

Based on statistical analysis, the third hypothesis was confirmed: that is, the students who have a greater fear of evaluation tend to have lower levels of communication competence. The results provide considerable evidence supporting this hypothesis. Students with higher fears of evaluation had significantly lower levels of communication competence than students with lower fears of evaluation. This finding is consistent with the current research literature, which has documented that social evaluative anxiety has a negative effect on interpersonal communication and participation in the classroom (Leary, 1983; Schulenberg et al., 2024). Watson and Friend (1969) similarly found that students with fear of negative evaluation restrict their ability to express their thoughts and have lower levels of perceived communication competence and participation.

The fourth hypothesis was confirmed as well: Fear of negative evaluation mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication competence. The mediation analysis showed how emotional intelligence can reduce fear of negative evaluation; thereby increasing communication competence. These results are consistent with earlier studies showing that emotional intelligence can indirectly affect communication behaviours by influencing social and emotional processes (Caballero-García & Ruiz, 2025; Saleem et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence gives students tools to reduce anxiety about being judged in social settings so that they can participate fully and confidently in their engagement with their peers (Mayer et al., 2016; Brackett et al., 2011).

According to the fifth hypothesis, it was proposed that self-efficacy would serve to strengthen the connection between emotional intelligence and communication competence. The current study supports the proposed hypothesis, as the results from the moderation analyses demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy display a significantly greater positive relationship between their levels of emotional intelligence and levels of communication competence than those with lower levels of self-

efficacy. The results of the current study support the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997) which posits that self-efficacy contributes to an individual's abilities to effectively put personal skills into practice. Similar findings have been published by Dugué et al. (2024) and Zimmerman (2000) who reported that self-efficacy promotes an increased perception of confidence and subsequent involvement in communicative tasks, thus enhancing the effects of emotional intelligence on interpersonal relationships.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions drawn from this analysis point to the importance of emotional intelligence in support of enhanced communication proficiency of respective students at university level. The findings indicated that emotional intelligence positively affected the students' ability to communicate directly but also impacted the communication competence of respective students indirectly, because of decreased apprehension around receiving negative evaluations due to one's communication abilities. Self-efficacy was found to positively moderate the effect of emotional intelligence on communication competence. Overall, these results demonstrate how emotional and cognitive psychological sources improve students' interpersonal functioning, and subsequently, increase student engagement in their academic pursuits.

Limitations

The current analysis does have several limitations that the reader should bear in mind while interpreting the results. First and foremost, the current study was cross-sectional in nature, limiting us from drawing conclusions about causal inferences between the independent and dependent variables. Secondly, the data for this study are based on self-reports; therefore, sample responses may have been influenced by perceived social desirability as well as by the subjectivity of respondents' perceptions (i.e., how they view themselves). Third, due to the sample used for this study (i.e., only university students), the degree of generalizability of these findings to other populations or age cohorts may not be sufficient. Further recommendations for future studies may include longitudinal study designs, multiple sources of data, and/or more diverse samples.

Suggestions

The implications of these results for practice can be summarised as follows: training for students in emotional intelligence and self-efficacy enhancement will help them develop their interpersonal and communication skills, as such both universities and other educational institutions could offer training programs on emotional intelligence and self-efficacy enhancement. Through developing students' emotional regulation, social confidence, and communication skills through various types of workshops, universities can also assist with fostering students to reduce their fear of negative evaluation and increase their willingness to engage in academic and social activities. Future research could focus on using emotional intelligence and self-efficacy in conjunction with different psychological variables (e.g., social support, resilience or communication anxiety) to gain insight as to how to assist students in improving their communication competence.

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