

The Relationship of Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy on Stress Management of Gen Z Students

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Abstract. Generation Z students face increasing academic and emotional demands in today's digital learning environment, making it essential to examine psychological factors that support effective stress management. Emotional intelligence (EI) and self-efficacy are identified as key constructs influencing students' ability to cope with academic challenges, yet their combined impact remains underexplored in Philippine higher education contexts. This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design to investigate the relationships among EI, self-efficacy, and stress management among 100 first-year engineering students from private universities in Cavite. Standardized instruments—including the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale, General Self-Efficacy Scale, and Brief-COPE—were utilized. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression. Findings revealed high levels of emotional intelligence and very high self-efficacy, while stress management was at a moderate level. Emotional intelligence demonstrated a significant positive relationship with stress management and emerged as a significant predictor. In contrast, self-efficacy showed no significant relationship with stress management and did not significantly predict it when combined with EI. Additionally, EI and self-efficacy were not significantly correlated. The results highlight EI as a crucial determinant of effective stress management, emphasizing the importance of emotional regulation and coping flexibility among Gen Z students. Although students possess strong confidence, self-efficacy alone does not ensure effective stress management without emotional competence. The study concludes that enhancing emotional skills may better support students' well-being and academic success. Recommendations include integrating socio-emotional learning interventions and stress management programs in educational settings.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Generation Z; Self-Efficacy; Stress' Stress Management

Introduction

Gen Z students are facing increasing academic demands in today's digital era which affects their learning experiences, confidence, emotional and stress management. To navigate these demands, Gen Z needs to develop their emotional intelligence and self-efficacy for them to adapt both academically and emotionally. Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, understand, express, and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Bru-Luna et al., 2021). It plays a vital role in students' overall functioning as it allows them to process emotional information and use it to guide thinking and behavior. Another key factor in academic success is self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy reflects an individual's confidence in controlling their behavior and motivation which helps students persist to achieve one's goal despite academic pressures and challenges.

Studies show that higher emotional intelligence strengthens students' self-efficacy by improving their ability to manage emotions (Putri et al., 2024; Sun & Lyu, 2022), which led to greater confidence in managing academic tasks and emotional challenges. Emotional intelligence is also linked to stress management, which involves cognitive and behavioral strategies used to cope with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Students with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle academic stress, maintain resilience, and adapt to changing environments (MacCann et al., 2020; Fteiha & Awwad, 2020). Research suggests that Gen Z students generally demonstrate high emotional awareness and self-efficacy (Rothschadl, 2025; Rola et al., 2020). Despite these strengths, they may still struggle with emotional regulation and coping (Cahyono, 2024), indicating that high emotional intelligence and self-efficacy do not always lead to effective stress management, especially amid this digital era.

While previous studies have examined emotional intelligence and self-efficacy separately in relation to stress, limited empirical research has explored their combined influence on stress management among Gen Z students in Philippine higher education settings. Existing research mainly focused on the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy, as well as emotional intelligence and stress management, yet fewer studies have examined how these variables interact together. This gap limits a comprehensive understanding of how EI and self-efficacy together influence students' ability to cope with stress. Therefore, this study aims to determine the levels of emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and stress management among Gen Z students, examine the relationships among these variables, and assess their predictive influence on stress management. The findings of this study will provide insights for learners, educators, and policymakers in developing effective stress management strategies and integrating socio-emotional learning into education. Furthermore, the study supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting emotional resilience and enhancing students' overall well-being and academic success.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of emotional intelligence among Gen Z students?
2. What is the level of self-efficacy among Gen Z students?
3. What is the level of stress management among Gen Z students?
4. Is there a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy among Gen Z students?
5. Is there a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and stress management among Gen Z students?
6. Is there a significant relationship between self-efficacy and stress management among Gen Z students?
7. To what extent do emotional intelligence and self-efficacy predict stress management among Gen Z students?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on examining the relationship between emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and stress management among Generation Z students enrolled as first-year engineering students in selected private universities in Cavite during Academic Year 2025–2026. Specifically, the study assessed the levels of emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and stress management, determined the relationships among these variables, and identified whether emotional intelligence and self-efficacy significantly predict stress management. The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design and utilized standardized instruments, namely the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10), the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), and the Brief-COPE Inventory. The study was delimited to 100 participants aged 18 to 24 years selected through convenience sampling. As such, the findings are limited to the characteristics and experiences of the respondents and may not be generalized to all Generation Z students, students from other academic disciplines, public universities, or individuals outside the specified age group. Furthermore, the study examined only the variables of emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and stress management and did not consider other factors such as socioeconomic status, family environment, personality traits, academic performance, social support, or mental health conditions that may influence stress management outcomes. Additionally, the correlational nature of the study does not permit the establishment of causal relationships among the variables.

Literature Review

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been widely studied as it influences students' academic and psychological outcomes. It refers to the ability to perceive, understand, manage and regulate emotions effectively (Goleman, 1998). Beyond recognizing emotional patterns in oneself and others, EI also involves navigating interpersonal relationships and applying emotional understanding to decision-making and coping processes (George et al., 2026; Singh et al., 2022). It also operates alongside self-efficacy, which reflects students' beliefs in their capacity to face challenging situations and accomplish tasks successfully (Zhang, 2025). The interaction between EI and self-efficacy indicates that students who are emotionally competent and confident in their abilities are more likely to manage academic and psychosocial demands effectively. This is particularly relevant among Generation Z students, who are exposed to increased pressures in highly digitalized and competitive learning environments.

Existing findings consistently showed that higher EI was positively associated with psychological wellbeing and academic success (Heinrichs et al., 2023; Shengyao et al., 2024). This implies that emotional

competencies enhance students' ability to cope with stress and adapt to challenges (Vladg, 2025). However, some findings indicate that students with high EI still struggle to regulate their emotions in stressful situations (Liu et al., 2022). Moreover, personal distress has been also linked to emotion dysregulation, and specific difficulties in emotion regulation can impair executive functioning, hindering academic success (Nezhad & Delroba, 2024; Colonnello et al., 2024). A recent local study found a strong positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic self-efficacy among BSED science students, yet the relationship between EI and their actual academic achievement was weak and negative (Bacsarpa & Codilla, 2025).

A local study also revealed that Gen Z are competitive in nature and have high standards which are accompanied by significant distress and self-imposed pressure, despite having high emotional intelligence (Tagare et al., 2024). This underscored the dual-edged nature of EI and self-efficacy in stress management. Overconfidence, may lead to ineffective coping strategies in certain contexts. This indicates that self-efficacy must be balanced with actual competence and adaptive strategies to be beneficial in managing academic stress. Stress management is important among Gen Z students, who face increasing academic demands in a fast-paced, technology-driven environment. Recent study showed that Gen Z students experience heightened academic pressure, which is associated with increased stress and anxiety levels (Tahir & Prabowo, 2026). Worthen and Cash (2023) further emphasized that effective stress management strategies are essential for maintaining both academic performance and psychological well-being.

In the Philippine context, local studies highlight the role of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy in shaping students' stress management. For instance, a study among freshmen found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance, suggesting that students who can understand and regulate their emotions are better equipped to cope with academic demands (Dela Cruz et al., 2019). Similarly, self-efficacy has been linked to greater resilience and persistence, indicating that students who believe in their capabilities are more likely to adapt effective and problem-focused coping strategies when dealing with stress (Santos & Bautista, 2022). However, contrasting findings state that even with moderate to high EI, some students still struggle to manage stress due to external pressures such as family expectations and financial constraints (Garcia, 2023). These imply that while EI and self-efficacy contribute to academic success, their effectiveness in stress management may be influenced by contextual and environmental factors.

Overall, emotional intelligence and self-efficacy are significant psychological resources that contribute to students' academic success and stress management. EI enhances students' ability to understand and regulate emotions, while self-efficacy strengthens their confidence in handling academic challenges. When combined, they promote adaptive coping strategies, resilience, and improved psychological well-being among students. However, some studies indicate that high levels of EI do not always lead to effective emotional regulation in stressful situations, while others show that strong self-efficacy may not consistently result in better academic performance or stress outcomes. These findings indicate that the relationship among EI, self-efficacy, and stress management is more complex. Existing research remains limited in examining their combined or interactive effects, as most studies tend to investigate these variables separately. Furthermore, there are a few studies focusing specifically on Generation Z students, particularly within the Philippine context. To address these gaps, this study examines how emotional intelligence and self-efficacy interact in influencing stress management among Generation Z students in academic contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative research approach, specifically a descriptive-correlational design, to examine and describe the relationships among emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and stress management. It aimed to provide insights into how these variables interact and influence Generation Z's coping with stress without any manipulation of variables (Morallas & Baguio, 2025). This design is appropriate as it enables the systematic description of variables and the measurement of the strength and direction of their relationships (Bhandari, 2021). Furthermore, it establishes the statistical relationships among variables, allowing for a clarity of how emotional intelligence and self-efficacy influence stress management among Gen Z students.

Sampling Design

Despite the relatively larger sample size, the use of convenience sampling remains a limitation because it may introduce selection bias and restrict the generalizability of the findings. Although the increased number of participants helps improve the reliability and representativeness of the data compared to smaller samples, the participants were still drawn from specific institutions and academic programs. Consequently, the findings may not fully reflect the experiences and characteristics of all Gen Z students across different educational settings and fields of study. Future research is encouraged to employ probability-based sampling methods,

such as stratified or random sampling, and include participants from a wider range of academic disciplines and institutions to enhance the external validity and generalizability of the results.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in selected private universities located in the Province of Cavite, Philippines. Cavite is one of the rapidly developing provinces in the CALABARZON region and is home to numerous higher education institutions that cater to students from diverse socioeconomic and academic backgrounds. The locale was chosen because it provides access to a substantial population of Generation Z students enrolled in engineering programs, who are exposed to various academic demands and stressors associated with higher education. The selected private universities served as appropriate settings for examining the relationship between emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and stress management, as these institutions offer a learning environment where students regularly encounter academic, social, and personal challenges that may influence their emotional competencies, confidence in handling tasks, and coping strategies. The accessibility of the institutions and the availability of qualified respondents also contributed to the selection of the research locale.

Research Participants

The study focused on Gen Z students, particularly those aged 18-24, as this group was reported to exhibit significantly poorer mental well-being compared to older generations, manifesting elevated levels of fear, anxiety, and hopelessness (Lucchesi, 2022). The target population consisted of first-year engineering students enrolled in A.Y 2025-2026 from different private universities within Cavite, Philippines. Using convenience sampling, participants were chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate (Creswell, 2012). This approach allowed the researchers to efficiently gather data within accessible settings. According to Creswell (2012), a minimum of 30 participants is generally sufficient for correlational research to estimate population characteristics. In the present study, a total of 100 participants were included, exceeding the recommended minimum sample size. This larger sample enhances the statistical power of the study and provides more stable estimates of the relationships among the variables. Furthermore, a sample of 100 participants is considered adequate for detecting correlations (Bujang, 2024).

Research Instrument

The instruments for this study were drawn from several scales to measure each variable: the General Self-Efficacy (GSE), Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS) and Brief-COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory). The Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS) was developed by Davies, Stankov and Roberts (1998) and was refined (BEIS-10) by Davies et al. (2010) into a brief form to capture emotional intelligence as a multifaceted and concise construct that is relevant to social functioning and personal wellbeing of an individual. BEIS-10 measures five distinct dimensions which are appraisal of own emotions, appraisal of others' emotions, regulation of own emotion, regulation of other's emotion and utilisation of emotion. Its items are rated on a 5-point Likert Scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores indicating greater emotional intelligence. BEIS-10 is the appropriate instrument to measure emotional intelligence, as it gives emphasis on own emotion regulation and use of emotions which directly relate to adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies of participants. The four components also cover awareness, regulation and motivation which are central to stress management. BEIS-10 demonstrated strong internal reliability with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .74 to .91 (Davies et al., 2010). The General Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), is a 10-item self-report measure developed to assess optimistic self-beliefs of an individual to cope with different demands in life. It captures perceived self-efficacy of an individual that helps them to adapt to stressful circumstances and bounce back from adversity. GSE directly aligns with the aim of this study to measure participants' coping capacity in handling stressful situations, specifically academic related demands. Recorded responses on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not all true) to 4 (exactly true). Scores range from 10-40 (higher = stronger self-efficacy), with strong reliability ($\alpha=0.86-0.95$) and validity (Rezlescu, 2026). Brief-COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory) developed by Carver (1997) has become the most widely used and validated measures of coping strategies in psychological research. It is designed to measure a wide range of coping strategies of individuals in response to stress. Its foundation came from multiple models, including Lazarus and Folkman's (1985) stress and coping theory. Brief-COPE captures 14 distinct coping dimensions: active coping, planning, positive reframing, acceptance, humor, religion, using emotional support, using instrumental support, self-distraction, denial, venting, substance use, behavioral disengagement, and self-blame to measure the frequency of using various coping strategies across subscales. Participants respond using a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (I haven't been doing this at all) to 4 (I've been doing this a lot). Brief-COPE demonstrates good psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from acceptable to excellent across subscales ($\alpha = .65$ to $.90$) (Rodrigues et al., 2022).

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, ethical approval and informed consent were secured from all participants to ensure voluntary participation, confidentiality, and adherence to ethical research standards (Klykken, 2021). An informed consent form was provided to all participants, clearly explaining the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Also, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly emphasized. After which, the survey questionnaires were converted into an online format using Google Forms for efficient and accessible data collection. Survey link was distributed online to selected participants through communication platforms (e.g messenger or google email). Participants were given enough time to read the instructions and finish the survey at their own pace. During data collection, the researcher monitored responses to ensure target sample size was achieved. All responses were automatically recorded and stored securely on an encrypted file drive, with no identifiable information of the responses collected from participants to maintain anonymity. After data collection, the researcher reviewed, organized and prepared all the responses for statistical analysis.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What is the level of emotional intelligence among Gen Z students?

Table 1. Level of Emotional Intelligence

Subscales	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Appraisal of Own Emotions	4.08	0.1768	High
Appraisal of Others' Emotions	3.92	0.4101	Average
Regulation of Own Emotions	3.65	0.5657	Average
Regulation of Others' Emotions	3.57	0.6364	Average
Utilisation of Emotions	4.03	0.0071	High
Emotional Intelligence	3.85	0.3849	High

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation computed for the scale of emotional intelligence. The overall mean of emotional intelligence among Gen Z students revealed a high overall level of EI ($M=3.85$), suggesting that participants generally possess strong emotional competence which allows them to recognize, understand and utilise emotions effectively. Notably, appraisal of one's own emotions subscale has the highest mean value ($M=4.08$) among the five dimensions, interpreted as high. This means that participants have the capacity to identify and understand their own emotional states including awareness of mood changes, recognition of physiological responses to emotions, and the ability to label emotional experiences. According to Garner et al. (2025), students with strong emotional awareness also tend to perform better academically. This shows how having a high level of self-awareness is not just an important component of emotional intelligence, but it is found to be useful in helping students navigate the demands of higher education by helping them perform better and be resilient. Participants also reported a high level of utilization of emotions ($M=4.03$), indicating that Gen Z students are generally capable of using emotions to guide their thinking, behavior and decision-making. This demonstrates that participants generally are capable of using their emotions productively to sustain their motivations and use negative emotions as signals that provokes behavioral adjustments or problem solving when stressed. Moreover, Gen Z students reported average levels across three subscales. Appraisal of other's emotions ($M=3.92$), regulation of their own emotions ($M=3.65$), and regulation of others' emotions ($M=3.57$) all fell within the average range. It reveals that while Gen Z students are capable of perceiving and interpreting others' emotional states, there are still areas for improvement in terms of emotional management skills related to regulating their own or other's emotions effectively during stressful situations. This aligns with recent research findings indicating that Gen Z exhibits lower emotional self-regulation compared to Millennials, particularly in academic stress (Sayyed & Inamda, 2025). Lower emotional perception and regulation are also found to be associated with students' difficulties navigating social complexities (Zhang et al., 2025), resulting in some challenges in providing support to their peers. This emphasized the importance of strengthening the emotional competencies, particularly emotional regulation of Gen Z students, to enhance such emotional skills to support their inner sense of capability and resilience. Therefore, implementing a targeted intervention and workshops would be beneficial and would allow Gen Z students to translate their emotional awareness into adaptive coping strategies and resilience.

Research Question 2: What is the level of self-efficacy among Gen Z students?

Table 2. Level of Self Efficacy

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
General Self Efficacy	3.61	0.7117	Very high

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation for the self-efficacy scale, with a mean value of 3.61, interpreted as a very high confidence level. This result showed that Gen Z students generally possess a strong level of confidence in their ability to effectively manage stress, demonstrate greater resilience in the face of adversity and perform successfully across life domains. Self-efficacy plays a critical role in coping with academic and personal challenges as it reflects an individual's confidence in their ability to organize and execute actions necessary to achieve desirable academic outcomes or performance (Artino, 2012). The present finding indicates that the Gen Z generally believe that they are capable of handling demanding situations and achieving their goals amidst academic challenges. This is consistent with the findings of Valizadeh (2021), who found that learners with high self-efficacy tend to be more confident, assertive and successful from their academic performance and achievement. Another study by Meng & Zhang (2023), further emphasized that self-efficacy plays a significant role in students' academic functioning as the strongest predictors of students' academic engagement and performance, indicating that students with stronger self-efficacy are more capable of handling challenges, sustaining motivation and will persevere when facing difficulties. Additionally, self-efficacy was found to be a protective factor against the negative impact of anxiety on academic engagement (Simón et al., 2024). Gen Z students with higher self-efficacy were expected to better cope with stress and remain engaged in their academic responsibilities despite challenges and emotional pressures. These findings underscore the significant role of self-efficacy in fostering both academic success and psychological well-being among students in higher education. The level of self-efficacy among the participants suggests that generally they possess strong adjustment capabilities, and sustained motivation to perform well academically. Such characteristics may enable them to navigate the academic, social, and emotional demands commonly experienced by their generation in higher education, supporting their overall development and achievement.

Research Question 3: What is the level of stress management among Gen Z students?

Table 3. Level of Stress Management

Domains	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Problem-focused coping	3.26	0.3368	High
Emotion-focused coping	3.08	0.4304	Moderate
Avoidant-focused coping	2.26	0.8566	Low
Stress Management	2.87	0.2770	Moderate

As shown in Table 3, participants reported the highest reliance on problem-focused coping, with a mean score of 3.26. This result indicates that participants generally tend to utilize more active coping strategies when dealing with stress, particularly through problem-focused approaches such as planning, seeking solutions, and directly addressing stressful situations. According to Azizy & Putri (2024), students' coping strategy is greatly influenced by the problem they are experiencing. Students are likely to utilize problem-focused coping strategies during academically challenging and controllable situations such as upcoming examinations (Hawsawi et al., 2024). These findings support the present result, suggesting that Gen Z students improve their ability to manage stress effectively by actively confronting stressors through coping mechanisms that enable them to analyze problems, formulate plans, seek relevant information, and implement practical solutions. This was closely followed by emotion-focused coping, which obtained a mean score of 3.08, indicating that participants moderately utilize coping focused on managing emotional responses to stress. This suggests that Gen Z students commonly regulate emotional distress through acceptance, emotional support, and positive reinterpretation. This aligns with the study of Gloria et al. (2024), who found that students frequently utilize emotion-focused coping as an immediate response to stress because it helps regulate emotions, reduce anxiety, and promote positive emotional states. They also added that it is beneficial to students during the initial stages of experiencing moderate to severe stress, as it allows them to manage their emotional reactions first before addressing and identifying the source of their stress. The relatively high use of emotion-focused coping and predominant utilization of problem focused coping reflects a flexible coping pattern of participants, allowing them to address both the practical and emotional demands associated with

stressful situations. A study by Freire et al. (2020) emphasized that coping flexibility enhances university students' control in their day-to-day challenges, resulting in them making them feel better at managing academic stress. Therefore, when emotional distress is reduced and individuals regain a sense of emotional stability during stressful situations, they tend to shift toward problem-focused coping strategies. Emotion-focused and problem-focused coping operate as complementary coping processes. Effective emotional regulation provides the psychological resources needed for rational decision-making and problem-solving, which enhances long-term stress management. This demonstrates that Gen Z students have adaptive coping flexibility, allowing them to shift between emotional regulation and problem-solving depending on the demands of the situation. However, avoidant-focused coping yielded the lowest mean score of 2.26, indicating that participants rarely relied on disengagement, denial, self-distraction, or other avoidance-based coping behaviors. This finding contrasts with the study of Pathak and Bhayani (2025), which found that Gen Z tend to use maladaptive coping strategies, particularly withdrawal and avoidance. However, in the present study, Gen Z students in higher education demonstrated low reliance on avoidant coping mechanisms, demonstrating their capacity to directly address and face stressors rather than avoid them. Notably, lower use of avoidance-based coping has been associated with more favorable psychological outcomes, reduced stress levels, and stronger problem-solving abilities. Therefore, the findings imply that most participants recognize the value of confronting challenges proactively instead of withdrawing from academic stress. Moreover, the moderate overall mean score ($M = 2.87$) for stress management indicates that while Gen Z students have the ability to use adaptive coping strategies, they may experience challenges in applying these strategies consistently when faced with academic and multiple life stressors. This finding is further emphasized by Waterhouse and Samra (2025), who reported that university students commonly employ a combination of coping strategies when dealing with multiple stressors encountered in higher education. They emphasized that although students are generally aware of effective coping behaviors and stress management techniques, the increasing demands of academic responsibilities, social expectations, and external pressures often limit their ability to consistently apply these strategies. This shows the effectiveness of Gen Z students' coping may still vary depending on the demands and complexity of the stressful situations. The present findings suggest that Gen Z students have developed adaptive coping skills but still require additional support to strengthen their stress management skills. Evidence-based interventions and psychoeducational program initiatives would promote coping flexibility, emotional regulation, resilience, and problem-solving skills that will help them apply it more consistently across various life situations.

Research Question 4: Is there a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy among Gen Z students?

Table 4. Relationship between Emotional intelligence and Self-efficacy among Gen Z students

	Correlation Coefficient	P-value	Interpretation
Emotional Intelligence	0.097	.337	Very weak correlation
Self-efficacy			

Table 4 reveals that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy among Gen Z students. The computed correlation coefficient of $r=0.097$ indicates a very weak correlation, while the p-value of 0.337 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. As a result, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that Gen Z students' emotional intelligence is not significantly associated with self efficacy among Gen Z students. Although participants generally possess strong emotional competence that allows them to recognize, understand and utilise their emotions effectively, these skills alone do not determine their belief in their own capabilities to accomplish academic tasks. Although the findings contrast with the majority of recent studies reporting a significant relationship between EI and self-efficacy across various populations and contexts, this remains understandable when viewed through the lens of the Gen Z population. Sari & Soelaiman (2025) explained that Gen Z's self-efficacy has been greatly influenced by their digital competence instead of their emotional intelligence. Growing up in an era of rapid technological advancement, Gen Z students tend to develop confidence through their ability to effectively utilize digital technologies and solve problems using technological resources. Therefore, their perceived capability to perform academic tasks may depend more on their digital skills and technological adaptability than on their emotional competencies. These findings are further supported by previous studies who found that Gen Z's digital literacy and competence directly drives self-efficacy in modern learning environments and achieving academic success (Zakir et al., 2025; Rahmatullah et al., 2026). This implies that within technology-driven educational settings, Gen Z students' confidence in accomplishing academic tasks may be more strongly influenced by their digital competencies

than by their emotional intelligence. Therefore, although EI remains important, it may not be sufficient to explain variations in self-efficacy among Gen Z students, whose confidence appears to be shaped by multiple contextual and technological factors.

Research Question 5: Is there a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and stress management among Gen Z students?

Table 5. Relationship between Emotional intelligence and Stress management among Gen Z students

	Correlation Coefficient	P-value	Interpretation
Emotional Intelligence	0.448	<.001	Moderate positive correlation
Stress management			

Table 5 showed that there is a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and stress management among Generation Z students. The computed correlation coefficient ($r=0.0448$) indicates a moderate positive correlation, while the p-value ($p<.001$) showed the statistically significant correlation between the two variables. This means that Gen Z students who possess higher levels of EI tend to have better capabilities in managing academic stress. Their ability to perceive, understand, and regulate one's own emotions appears to serve as a protective factor that allows the participants to navigate academic pressures more effectively. This finding is consistent with recent literature that shows EI as a key determinant of effective stress coping. García-Martínez et al. (2021) reported a significant inverse relationship between EI and academic stress among university students, stating that emotional regulation and clarity are helpful in reducing stress. Similarly, Bermejo-Martins et al. (2021) emphasized that EI significantly predicts the adoption of self-care activities which then help us to reduce stress. These studies reinforce the present finding that higher EI enables more adaptive responses to academic demands. Furthermore, the moderate correlation suggests that EI is an important factor to stress management, but is not the only contributing factor to it. Other factors, such as social support, coping styles, and environmental conditions, would likely interact with EI to influence stress outcomes. Recent studies found that social support significantly mediated the EI-stress relationship, indicating that emotionally intelligent students are better at using interpersonal resources to buffer stress (Ullah et al., 2023; Valenti et al., 2021). Therefore, EI acts as a protective personal resource for students dealing with academic stress, as it allows them to effectively manage and understand their emotions, while coping with negative emotions and nurturing positive relationships with others.

Research Question 6: Is there a significant relationship between self-efficacy and stress management among Gen Z students?

Table 6. Relationship between Self-efficacy and Stress management among Gen Z students

	Correlation Coefficient	P-value	Interpretation
Self-efficacy			
Stress management	-0.015	.883	Weak negative relationship

Table 6 indicates that there is no significant relationship between self-efficacy and stress management among Gen Z students. The computed correlation coefficient ($r = -0.015$) is close to zero, indicating a weak negative relationship, while the p-value ($p=.883$) is substantially higher than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected, suggesting that students' level of self-efficacy is not significantly associated with their ability to manage stress. While participants generally reported high levels of self-efficacy, it did not necessarily translate into better stress management. This finding suggests that stress management is a complex construct that can be influenced by various factors. While self-efficacy reflects an individual's confidence to overcome academic challenges, effective stress management may still depend on the availability of coping resources, emotional regulation skills, the nature and intensity of stressors encountered. Ruiz-Camacho et al. (2025) found that students' stress management can be strongly determined by their coping strategies they apply during stressful situations rather than by their confidence alone. They indicated in their study that students with high self-efficacy can effectively manage stress only if they consistently apply adaptive coping behaviors. Therefore, high self-efficacy does not automatically guarantee effective stress regulation, particularly among Gen Z students who face unique academic pressures and technological demands. This highlights the need for student wellness programs that have a comprehensive approach on strengthening

students' confidence and adaptive coping strategies that may better equip Gen Z students to manage academic stressors effectively.

Research Question 7: To what extent do emotional intelligence and self-efficacy predict stress management among Gen Z students?

Table 7. Emotional intelligence and self-efficacy as predictor of stress management among Gen Z students

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Interpretation
Intercept	1.4831	0.3428	4.327	<.001	Significant
Emotional intelligence	0.3794	0.0761	4.986	<.001	Significant
Self-efficacy	-0.0366	0.0564	-0.648	.519	Not significant

Table 7 presents the multiple regression analysis examining the extent to which EI and self-efficacy predict stress management among Gen Z students. The results showed that EI significantly predicts stress management ($\beta = 0.3794$, $t = 4.986$, $p < .001$), while self-efficacy does not significantly predict stress management ($\beta = -0.0366$, $t = -0.648$, $p = .519$). These findings indicate that when both variables worked together, only EI makes a significant contribution to students' stress management. Conversely, self-efficacy does not contribute to predicting stress management among Gen Z students. The significant predictive effect of EI suggests that Gen Z students that are better able to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions are likely to manage stress effectively. Given that Gen Z students frequently encounter academic demands, social pressures, financial concerns, and continuous digital engagement, EI allows them to recognize emotional responses to stressful situations first and use adaptive coping before academic stress becomes overwhelming. These findings align with recent studies that found EI as an important competency for university students as it enhances their emotional regulation and adaptation to stressful learning environments (Gilar-Corbi et al., 2025; Shubayr & Dailah, 2025). Therefore, students with higher emotional intelligence tend to be more capable of maintaining emotional balance, making rational decisions under pressure, and responds effectively to stress. In contrast, self-efficacy did not appear as a significant predictor of stress management. Although participants generally reported high levels of self-efficacy, it did not necessarily translate into effective stress management when EI was also considered. EI alone may not be sufficient for managing stress if students lack the emotional competencies needed to respond appropriately to stressful experiences. Therefore, Gen Z students may feel confident of completing their tasks yet still have difficulty regulating anxiety, frustration, or emotional exhaustion during challenging situations. This finding aligns with G. Sun and Lyu (2022), which found that EI has both direct and indirect effects on students' self-efficacy through coping styles. This means that EI may be a more important resource than self efficacy alone in terms of managing stress. The absence of a significant effect of self-efficacy in the model may also suggest that its influence on stress management overlaps with EI. Overall, the findings showed that EI is a stronger predictor of stress management among Gen Z students, whereas self-efficacy does not significantly contribute once EI is considered. This underscores the vital role of emotional competencies in assisting students to navigate the various academic challenges faced by Gen Z. While fostering self-efficacy to students remains important, higher education institutions must have greater improvements in terms of implementing programs that will advance emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, resilience, and adaptive coping skills of Gen Z students. Such initiatives will likely have a more direct impact on students' capacity to manage academic stress effectively and maintain psychological well-being throughout their academic journey.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure compliance with good research practices (Mirza et al., 2023). Ethical standards were observed throughout the entire research process based on the APA Research Ethics Code (2024). A written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation. The consent form provided detailed information explaining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and measures taken to protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were explicitly informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. To ensure data security and participant privacy, all questionnaire responses were collected anonymously. No personally identifiable information such as names, addresses, or contact details was gathered. Digital data were stored on a password-protected, encrypted drive accessible only to the researcher. No physical records or notes were maintained, as all data were collected electronically via an online questionnaire platform (e.g., Google Forms). Participants who experienced discomfort while answering the questionnaires were provided with contact information for available mental health resources. At the end of the questionnaire, a brief debriefing statement was presented, reiterating the study's purpose and offering access to support services if needed. All data and

related materials will be securely disposed of five years after research completion. These procedures ensured that the study was conducted responsibly and with respect for the participants' wellbeing and rights.

Conclusion

This study concluded that Generation Z engineering students in selected private universities in Cavite generally possess high emotional intelligence, very high self-efficacy, and moderate stress management abilities. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence has a significant positive relationship with stress management and serves as a significant predictor of students' ability to cope with academic stress. In contrast, self-efficacy was found to have no significant relationship with stress management and did not significantly predict stress management when analyzed alongside emotional intelligence. Furthermore, no significant relationship was observed between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy. These results suggest that while Gen Z students are confident in their capabilities, their effectiveness in managing stress depends more on their emotional competencies, particularly their ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions. Therefore, strengthening emotional intelligence through targeted interventions and support programs may contribute to improved stress management and overall psychological well-being among Generation Z students in higher education.

Recommendations

The findings of this study provide several important recommendations for education, policy, and future research. For educational institutions and school administrators, the significant role of emotional intelligence (EI) in predicting effective stress management among Gen Z students suggests the need to implement programs that strengthen emotional skills and coping strategies. These may include stress management workshops, resilience training, and accessible counseling services that provide individualized support. Conducting regular needs assessments is also recommended to better understand students' stressors and develop targeted interventions. For policymakers, it is important to allocate sufficient resources for mental health services and faculty training, ensuring that educators are equipped to recognize and respond to student distress. The integration of social and emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum is also encouraged to promote emotional development across all levels of education. For Gen Z students, engaging in self-care practices, developing emotional regulation skills, and seeking support from peers or professionals are essential in managing academic stress. They are also encouraged to use digital tools responsibly while maintaining healthy boundaries to avoid burnout. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to explore factors influencing self-efficacy among Gen Z, particularly the role of digital literacy, and to use longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches to better understand how emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and stress management develop over time.

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