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Emotional Intelligence as a Buffer: Mitigating the Impact of Job Stress on Researcher Performance

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the role of emotional intelligence in moderating the relationship between job stress and researcher performance at a research institution in Indonesia. This study is a correlational study using a survey method. A total of 142 researchers from one of the research institutions in Indonesia were obtained using a convenience sampling technique. Three instruments were used, namely the Effort–Reward Imbalance Questionnaire (ERI) to measure job stress, the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) for emotional intelligence, and the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) for researcher performance. Data analysis was carried out using correlation analysis and moderated regression analysis using the Jamovi application version 2.6.25. Based on the correlation analysis, the results showed that job stress correlated negatively with performance significantly ($r = -0.33$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that the more a researcher is given work pressure, the more their performance decreases. Emotional intelligence correlated positively with performance ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that the higher a researcher's emotional intelligence, the greater their performance. The results of the moderation regression analysis indicate that emotional intelligence does not act as a moderator ($b = 0.11$, $p > 0.05$). Based on these results, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence did not buffer the negative effect of job stress on performance. Therefore, to improve researcher performance, it is necessary to decrease the level of job stress.

Keyword: Job Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Performance, Moderation, Researcher.

INTRODUCTION

Performance generally refers to the extent to which an individual achieves work outcomes in accordance with the organization's standards or targets, including the quality, quantity, and effectiveness of task execution. Within the research profession, performance is reflected in the ability to produce scientific outputs, accomplish research objectives, develop academic collaborations, and generate meaningful contributions to the advancement of knowledge and innovation (Aldieri et al., 2018). Accordingly, researcher performance cannot be viewed solely in terms of productivity, but must also consider the relevance, quality, and

broader impact of the outputs produced. In this context, maintaining strong performance has become increasingly important, particularly for researchers working under demanding institutional expectations.

Researchers at research institution X face considerable pressure to meet institutional performance targets. These demands include publishing scientific articles, increasing research collaboration, securing research grants, and participating in seminars that contribute to national development and innovation (Rossoni et al., 2024). Based on communication with the Human Resources department of the institution, there has been an increase in the proportion of researchers classified under "low" and "very low" performance, rising from 0.12% in 2023 to 0.17% in 2024 (A. Aisha, personal communication, April 15, 2025). This increase has direct consequences for researchers, including the risk of demotion, honorable termination of employment, and significant reductions in monthly performance allowances.

Beyond its impact on individuals, the inability to achieve research output targets also leads to inefficient use of budget resources and hinders the conversion of research findings into innovations that can benefit the wider community. Therefore, improving researcher performance is essential, not only to ensure the achievement of annual targets but also to enhance productivity and the institution's scientific reputation, as well as to strengthen the contribution of research to the long-term development of the national innovation ecosystem. This is also in line with the organization's strategic direction, which emphasizes strengthening emotional intelligence capacity and fostering innovation through the effective management of high-quality human resources.

High levels of job stress have a negative impact on researchers' psychological well-being and performance. Job stress refers to the physiological and psychological responses that arise from a mismatch between job demands and an individual's capacity to cope with them (Landívar et al., 2025). When not properly managed, job stress in public institutions with high levels of bureaucracy can lead to reduced efficiency, increased errors, and declining performance (Ahli et al., 2024). This is consistent with the Job Demand–Resources (JD-R) model, which explains that stress occurs when job demands exceed the personal resources available to an individual (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). When this imbalance persists over time, individuals' energy becomes depleted, resulting in decreased performance (Bilginoğlu & Yozgat, 2018).

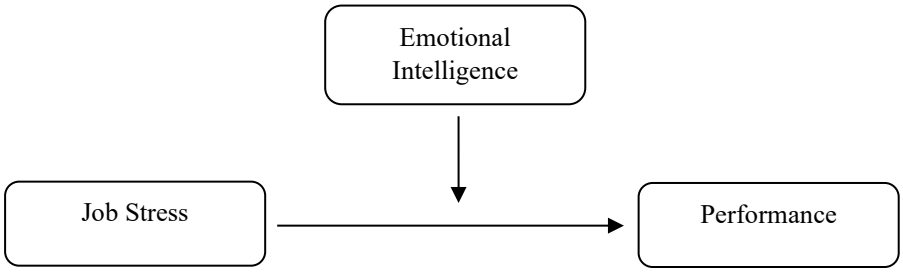
Emotional intelligence plays an important role in buffering the negative effects of job stress. It is defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions as well as those of others effectively (Côté, 2017). Individuals with high emotional intelligence tend to have better emotional regulation, enabling them to control impulsive reactions and adjust coping strategies when facing stress (Hasan et al., 2023; Petrides et al., 2016). Research has shown that emotional intelligence is positively associated with both performance and psychological well-being (Castillo-López & Domínguez, 2024). Researchers with high emotional intelligence are generally more resilient, more likely to view job stress as a manageable challenge, and able to remain productive despite facing obstacles (Gong et al., 2019).

Individuals with high emotional intelligence are able to engage in cognitive reappraisal of job stress, viewing it as a source of growth rather than a threat to well-being. In addition, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping suggests that job stress is influenced not only by the situation itself but also by an individual's cognitive appraisal of the threat and their perceived ability to cope (Obbarius et al., 2021). Therefore, emotional intelligence has the potential to function as a moderating factor that weakens the negative impact of job stress on researcher performance by enhancing adaptive capacity in dealing with stress.

However, previous studies have reported mixed findings regarding the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between job stress and performance. Tageja et al.

(2019) found a significant moderating effect in the academic sector, while other studies suggest that emotional intelligence acts more as a direct predictor of performance rather than as a moderator (Yusoff et al., 2023). These differences may be influenced by the type of work, organizational culture, or the nature of job demands. Empirical studies examining this relationship in public research institutions in Indonesia remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine whether emotional intelligence can serve as a moderator that reduces the negative effect of job stress on researcher performance in public research institutions. Based on the theoretical framework and prior research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Job stress is negatively correlated with researcher performance.
H2: Emotional intelligence is positively correlated with researcher performance.
H3: Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between job stress and researcher performance, such that the effect of job stress on performance is weaker among individuals with higher emotional intelligence.



Source: Writer
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHOD

Design and Participants

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design. The participants consisted of 142 researchers from research institution X who had worked for more than one year and agreed to participate in this study through informed consent. Data were collected online using Google Forms through a convenience sampling technique. Demographic information, including age, highest level of education, and years of service, was collected as control variables.

Instruments

This study used three psychometric scales adapted to the Indonesian context. Job stress was measured using the Effort-Reward Imbalance Questionnaire (ERI), developed by Siegrist et al. (2019) and adapted by Widanarko et al. (2019), with a reported equivalence level of 95% and 16 items. Two minor items were revised to align with administrative and technical terms used in research institutions; for example, the term "supervisor" was replaced with "atasan." A sample item is: "*Saya dihargai dengan layak oleh atasan atau orang-orang yang berwenang*."

Emotional intelligence was measured using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), developed by Acosta-Prado & Zárate Torres (2019) and adapted by Nurida (2020), with a full adaptation level of 100%, as all 16 items demonstrated adequate semantic validity. A sample item is: "*Saya sangat memahami apa yang saya rasakan*."

Researcher performance was measured using the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) developed by Koopmans et al. (2016) and adapted by Widyastuti & Hidayat (2018). The scale consists of 18 items, with approximately 90% contextual adaptation. One item related to interpersonal behaviour was modified to better fit the research environment.

A sample item is: "*Saya berusaha untuk menjaga pengetahuan tentang pekerjaan saya tetap aktual*."

Data Analysis Techniques

This study employed descriptive analysis to describe the characteristics of the data and conducted reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha to ensure the internal consistency of the instruments. Classical assumption tests, including normality, linearity, and heteroscedasticity, were performed prior to inferential analysis. Hypotheses H1 and H2 were tested using Pearson correlation analysis. Meanwhile, H3 was examined using moderation analysis by including an interaction term between job stress and emotional intelligence in predicting researcher performance. All analyses were conducted using Jamovi version 2.6.25.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to present job stress, emotional intelligence, and researcher performance across respondent characteristics. Based on educational level, researchers with doctoral and master's degrees showed similar levels of emotional intelligence (M = 3.79), with slightly higher performance observed among doctoral graduates (M = 3.77). Meanwhile, researchers with bachelor's degrees reported the lowest job stress (M = 2.73) but also slightly lower performance (M = 3.64).

In terms of age, the 46-55 and 56-65 age groups demonstrated the highest performance (M = 3.80), while emotional intelligence peaked in the 46-55 age group (M = 3.88). The 36-45 age group also showed relatively high emotional intelligence (M = 3.84) and performance (M = 3.78), suggesting that mid-career stages are associated with stronger emotional regulation and work outcomes. In contrast, younger researchers aged 26-35 reported lower emotional intelligence (M = 3.60) and performance (M = 3.51), indicating potential challenges in managing work demands during early career stages.

Based on years of service, researchers with 21-25 years of experience showed the highest performance (M = 3.90) and emotional intelligence (M = 3.93), followed by those with 11-15 years of experience (performance M = 3.87; emotional intelligence M = 3.88). On the other hand, individuals with 6-10 years of experience reported relatively higher job stress (M = 3.18) and lower performance (M = 3.57).

Overall, the descriptive findings that greater work experience and age are generally associated with higher emotional intelligence and better performance. However, job stress remains present across all groups, with variation depending on career stage and experience.

Table 1. Descriptive

Variables	Category	N	Mean		
			Job Stress	Emotional Intelligence	Performance
Education	Doctoral	48	3.09	3.79	3.77
	Master	83	3.05	3.79	3.72
	Bachelor	11	2.73	3.82	3.64
Age	26-35 Years Old	28	3.01	3.60	3.51
	36-45 Years Old	51	3.21	3.84	3.78
	46-55 Years Old	28	3.07	3.88	3.80
	56-65 Years Old	29	2.82	3.86	3.80
	> 66 Years Old	6	2.58	3.57	3.72
Year of Service	1-5 Years	41	3.13	3.84	3.77
	6-10 Years	24	3.18	3.72	3.57
	11-15 Years	13	2.94	3.88	3.87
	16-20 Years	18	3.05	3.72	3.58
	21-25 Years	8	2.92	3.93	3.90

Variables	Category	N	Mean		
			Job Stress	Emotional Intelligence	Performance
	> 25 Years	38	2.90	3.77	3.78

Note. M = Mean, N = 142

Source: Jamovi (v2.6.25)

Reliability and Validity Results

Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, while item validity was evaluated through corrected item–total correlation (CITC). The reliability analysis indicated that all instruments demonstrated high internal consistency: job stress (α = 0.91), emotional intelligence (α = 0.86), and performance (α = 0.87). These values suggest that all instruments are highly reliable (α > 0.80) (Setyaedhi, 2024). In addition, validity testing confirmed that each instrument was valid for measuring its intended construct. According to CITC, Most items met the minimum threshold of > 0.30, indicating acceptable item validity (Liu et al., 2025). However, two items showed CITC values below the recommended threshold: OEA1 (0.27) and CP6 (0.11).

a. OEA1: *Saya selalu mengetahui emosi teman-teman saya melalui perilakunya.*
b. CP6: *Saya mengambil tanggung jawab ekstra.*

Low CITC values suggest that responses to these items were not sufficiently aligned with the overall scale scores, which reduced their effectiveness in reflecting the intended constructs. From a substantive perspective, this issue may also stem from differences in how respondents understood negatively phrased statements, as well as variations in workplace norms and interpretations of supervisory behavior or personal initiative at work.

Based on both the statistical criterion (CITC < 0.30) and a review of item content, the three items were removed from the subsequent analysis. Following their exclusion, the reliability coefficients of the three instruments showed improvement with job stress (0.91), emotional intelligence (0.87), and performance (0.88). Moreover, the CITC values of the remaining items were within a more acceptable range, indicating that the revised instruments were more internally consistent and more suitable for the next stage of hypothesis testing.

The classical assumption tests showed that the data met the requirements for regression analysis. The residuals were normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk p = 0.40), no autocorrelation was detected (Durbin-Watson = 2.10), no multicollinearity was found (VIF = 1.02), and no extreme outliers were identified (Cook's Distance = 0.12) (Prima et al., 2025). Therefore, the data were suitable for further inferential analysis.

Correlation Analysis Results

The correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between job stress and performance (r = -0.33, p < 0.05), indicating that higher levels of work pressure were associated with lower researcher performance. In contrast, emotional intelligence showed a significant positive correlation with performance (r = 0.64, p < 0.05), indicating that researchers with higher emotional intelligence tended to demonstrate better performance.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis Results

Variables	1	2	3
1. Job Stress	-		
2. Emotional Intelligence	-0.13	-	
3. Performance	-0.33*	0.64*	-

Note. N = 142, *p < 0.05.

Source: Jamovi (v2.6.25)

Moderation Analysis Results

Emotional intelligence was not found to act as a moderator in the relationship between job stress and performance (b = 0.11, p > 0.05), indicating that it did not buffer the negative effect of job stress on researcher performance. Thus, improving emotional intelligence appears to be a more important factor in enhancing performance, as it shows a stronger contribution compared to job stress ($R^2 = 0.40$ vs. $R^2 = 0.11$ in predicting performance).

Table 3. Moderation Analysis Results

Variable	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Job Stress	- 0.18	0.05	- 3.91	< 0.05
Emotional Intelligence	0.65	0.08	8.53	< 0.05
Job Stress ✻ Emotional Intelligence	0.11	0.12	0.96	> 0.05

Note. N = 142

Sumber: Jamovi (v2.6.25)

The results of the simple slope analysis indicate that the effect of job stress on performance remains negative and significant across all levels of emotional intelligence: low (b = -0.23, p < 0.05), average (b = -0.18, p < 0.05), and high (b = -0.14, p < 0.05). However, the magnitude of this effect becomes weaker at higher levels of emotional intelligence.

Table 4. Simple Slope

Level	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Average	- 0.18	0.05	- 3.91	< 0.05
Low (-1SD)	- 0.23	0.08	- 2.89	< 0.05
High (+1SD)	- 0.14	0.05	- 2.92	< 0.05

Note. Show the effect of job stress on performance at different levels of emotional intelligence

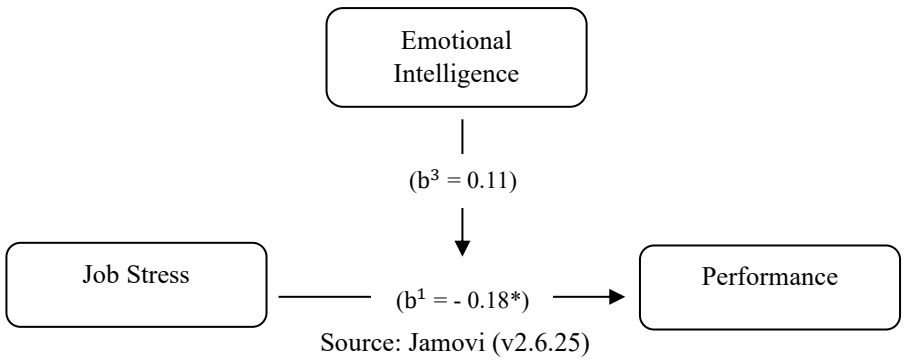
Sumber: Jamovi (v2.6.25)

Hypothesis Testing Results

The correlation analysis showed that job stress has a significant negative relationship with performance (r = -0.33, p < 0.05). This indicates that higher work pressure is associated with lower researcher performance. Therefore, H1, which proposes a negative relationship between job stress and researcher performance, is supported.

The findings also revealed a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and performance (r = 0.64, p < 0.05). This suggests that researchers with better emotional intelligence tend to demonstrate higher performance. Thus, H2, which states that emotional intelligence is positively related to researcher performance, is supported.

The moderation analysis indicated that the interaction between job stress and emotional intelligence was not significant (b = 0.11, p > 0.05). This finding suggests that emotional intelligence does not weaken the relationship between job stress and researcher performance. Therefore, H3, which examines the moderating role of emotional intelligence, is not supported. It can be concluded that to improve researcher performance, it is necessary to decrease the level of job stress.



Source: Jamovi (v2.6.25)

Note. *significant at l.o.s. 0.05

Figure 2. Model of emotional intelligence's moderation effect of job stress on performance

Research Implications

From a theoretical perspective, the findings can be explained using the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Obbarius et al., 2021), which emphasizes that the impact of job stress on performance depends on how individuals appraise and respond to such demands. The more an individual perceives work tasks as stressors, the more likely their performance will be hindered.

Nevertheless, the positive relationship still highlights the practical value of emotional intelligence in strengthening psychological resilience and adaptive capacity among researchers. In the end, the researchers could cope with job stress and improve their performance. Training programs to increase emotional intelligence, such as emotional regulation training and mindfulness-based coaching, may help researchers transform work pressure into a positive driving force in high-demand work environments (Lomas et al., 2019). It is also necessary to give researchers training on how to cope with job stress.

From a practical standpoint, these findings suggest that research institutions in Indonesia should integrate emotional intelligence development and job stress management into their performance management policies. Such initiatives can support researchers in understanding their emotional responses to work demands and in developing more effective coping strategies. In addition, the organization should review administrative workload and strengthen social support and reward systems to enable researchers to allocate their energy more effectively toward research activities. This approach aligns with the dual pathway principle of the JD-R model (Bakker & de Vries, 2021), which highlights the importance of balancing job demands and resources to sustain performance and psychological well-being.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships among variables. In addition, the relatively homogeneous characteristics of the respondents, particularly in terms of educational background and work experience, may have reduced data variability and influenced the analysis results, especially in testing the moderation effect.

Based on the findings, several considerations can be proposed. From a practical perspective, research institution X is encouraged to integrate emotional intelligence development programs, such as emotional regulation training, coping strategy workshops, and mindfulness-based approaches, as part of efforts to enhance researcher performance. Furthermore, workload management should be carefully addressed to prevent sustained negative effects of job stress.

Researchers are also encouraged to include additional relevant variables, such as organizational support, leadership style, or work motivation, which may influence the relationship between job stress and performance. The use of more representative sampling techniques is also recommended to improve the generalizability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine whether emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between job stress and researcher performance in research institution X. The results indicate that job stress has a significant negative relationship with performance, while emotional intelligence shows a significant positive relationship with performance. These findings suggest that higher levels of job stress are associated with lower researcher performance, whereas the

ability to manage emotions contributes to improved performance. Therefore, to improve researchers' performance, it is necessary to give training programs to improve emotional intelligence and to cope with job stress.

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