



Relationship between Fictional Reading and Emotional Intelligence: Mediating effect of Critical Thinking

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between fictional reading, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking among university students. A sample of 360 students, predominantly female, was selected using a convenience sampling method. Data were collected through a survey questionnaire administered across various universities in Rawalpindi, including the University of Engineering and other colleges. The study employed standardized measures, including the Narrative Transportation Scale, Critical Thinking Skills Scale, and Emotional Intelligence Scale. Descriptive statistics indicated that the instruments possessed good psychometric properties, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The results of the Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between fictional reading, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking. Furthermore, mediation analysis showed that fictional reading significantly mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and critical thinking. The findings of the t-test analysis indicated that individuals who engaged in fictional reading exhibited higher levels of emotional intelligence and critical thinking compared to those who did not. These results have implications for the development of emotional intelligence and critical thinking skills through fictional reading. The study's results suggest that fictional reading can be a valuable tool for enhancing emotional intelligence and critical thinking skills among university students. By incorporating fictional reading into their academic and personal lives, students may be able to improve their emotional intelligence and critical thinking abilities, leading to better academic and professional outcomes.

Keywords: Fictional Reading, Emotional Intelligence, Critical Thinking

Introduction

Fictional reading is a versatile and dynamic activity that has captivated audiences for centuries. Through this, individuals can immerse themselves in speculative worlds, delve into complex characters and relationships, engage with thought-provoking ideas and themes. This activity allows readers to exercise their imagination and creativity, fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. Empirical evidences suggest that fictional narratives provide personal insights; therefore, they are important for people to learn about themselves (Oatley K, 1999). Fiction provides a temporary break from reality while readers can become fully engaged in the story and connect with the characters, emotions, and experiences. Fiction can preserve cultural traditions and histories, showcase diverse cultures, experiences, and perspectives, and reflect and critique societal issues, challenging readers to think critically. Reading enhances one's social-cognitive ability (Oatley, 2016). Some of the more popular genres of fiction include: Romance, Science, Thriller, Fantasy, Crime, Historical, Literary, horror etc.



Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to recognize and understand emotions in oneself and others, and to use this awareness to guide thought and behavior. Emotional intelligence can be categorized into several types: Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Empathy, Social Skills. Understanding these types of emotional intelligence can help individuals develop their emotional awareness and management skills, leading to better relationships, decision-making, and overall well-being. Goleman (1995, 2001) claims that, at best, IQ only accounts for twenty percent of the factors determining success in life, whereas the emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) accounts for the other eighty percent (Goleman, 1995).

Critical thinking is a systematic evaluation and analysis of information and ideas to form a judgment and make decisions. It involves: Breaking complex information into smaller parts, Assessing the credibility and relevance of information and Drawing logical conclusions. Critical thinking is important for problem-solving, fostering innovative solutions, enhancing academic performance and research skills. It constitutes a crucial survival skill, streamlining personal growth and navigation through life's challenges (Brookfield, 2012). Critical thinking prepares students for life beyond school. It is foundational for: Solving workplace problems, Making personal decisions, Contributing to society. According to a World Economic Forum (WEF) report, critical thinking is among the top skills needed in the workforce today.

Engaging in fictional reading has a profound impact on both emotional intelligence and critical thinking. As readers immerse themselves in complex narratives and characters, they develop emotional intelligence by gaining insight into others' emotions and practicing empathy. Fictional reading requires critical thinking skills, asking readers to analyze and interpret plots, characters, and themes. Evaluating motivations and actions of characters allows readers to think critically and make informed judgments. Moreover, the emotional intelligence gained through reading enhances critical thinking skills, leading to a more empathetic, analytical, and thoughtful individual (Sinha & Vakharia, 2023).

Narrative transportation theory, proposed by Green and Brock suggests that people become immersed in a story when they experience focused attention, emotional engagement, mental imagery, and a detachment from reality while reading. In this state, individuals tend to remember the story content better, adopt beliefs and attitudes more aligned with the narrative, and engage less critically with its content. Van Laer, de Ruyter, Visconti, and Wetzels further elaborate that narrative transportation occurs when a reader feels as if they have entered the story's world, driven by empathy for the characters and imagination of the plot. Braddock and Dillard found in their meta-analysis that familiarity with the story's content and alignment with its beliefs can modify the strength of the reader's attitudes, intentions, and beliefs after exposure.

The hypothesis of the study are:



- There is a positive relationship between fictional reading, emotional intelligence and critical thinking.
- Critical thinking and fictional reading are the significant predictors of emotional intelligence.
- Critical thinking mediates the relationship between fictional reading and emotional intelligence.
- There is a significant difference in emotional intelligence and critical thinking among readers and non-readers.

Materials and Methods

The study used a cross-sectional correlational design to examine the relationships between multiple variables in a diverse group of participants at a single point in time. While random and snowball sampling technique is used.

The Green & Brock Narrative Transportation Scale (2000) is a psychological measure used to assess Narrative transportation the extent to which individuals become immersed in a story, losing awareness of their surroundings and critically evaluating the narrative. The Narrative Transportation Scale has been used in various fields, including Media studies to understand how narratives impact audiences, Marketing to assess the effectiveness of narrative advertising, Health communication to develop persuasive health narratives. The scale typically consists of items that assess cognitive, emotional, and imagery-related aspects of narrative transportation. This scale contains 12 items with response options ranges from 1 to 7 based on engagement with fictional characters. Higher score indicates more involvement in characters.

Wong and law emotional intelligence scale is a psychological measure developed by Wong and law in 2002. It is a sort of 16 items measure of emotional intelligence developed for use in management research and studies. The items in WLESI is based on the ability model of emotional intelligence to recognize one's own emotions, others emotions, use of emotion and regulation of emotion.

The critical thinking disposition assessment developed by Ricketts and Rudd in 2005. It's a 26-item, 1 to 5-point Likert scale that measures critical thinking dispositions, particularly engagement, cognitive maturity, and innovativeness. The scale is used to assess an individual's pre-disposed attitude towards critical thinking. High rating shows high engagement, maturity and innovativeness. It is particularly used in educational settings.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of the Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=360)



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Demographic	<i>f</i>
Gender	
Male	21
Female	339
Education	
Matric	9
Intermediate	31
Graduate	305
Reader or not	
Yes	209
No	151
Reading frequency	
Daily	71
Weekly	81
Monthly	70
Rarely	138
Genre Preference	
Romance	104
Science fiction	28
Fantasy	99
Mystery	59
Thriller	26
Horror	12
Historical fictional	20
Crime	11
Reading format	
E-Books	193
Hard books	167

Table 1 presents a descriptive analysis of demographic variables for a sample size of 360 respondents. The data is categorized into several demographic characteristics, including gender, education level, reading habits, and preferences. The gender distribution reveals a significant disparity, with females constituting the majority (339, 94.2%) and males making up a smaller proportion (21, 5.8%). This suggests that the sample is predominantly female and majority of respondents are graduates (305, 84.7%), followed by those with intermediate education (31, 8.6%), and a small percentage with matriculation (9, 2.5%).

It also explores whether the respondents are read or not, and their reading frequency. The results show that a majority of respondents (209, 58.1%) reported reading, while a significant minority (151, 41.9%) did not. In terms of reading frequency, the most common response was "Rarely" (138, 38.3%), followed by "Weekly" (81, 22.5%), "Daily" (71, 19.7%), and "Monthly" (70, 19.4%) and Romance is the most popular genre (104, 28.9%), closely followed by Fantasy (99, 27.5%). Other popular genres include Mystery (59, 16.4%) and Science Fiction (28, 7.9%). The least preferred genres are Horror (12, 3.3%) and Crime (11, 3.1%). E-Books are the preferred format (193, 53.6%), although a significant proportion of respondents still prefer Hard Books (167, 46.4%).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for all the study variables (N=360)

Variables	<i>k</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range		Skewness
					Actual	Potential	
	12	.788	51.88	12.18	12-78	12-84	-.522
FR							
	16	.880	77.51	16.64	16-112	16-112	-.735
EI							
	26	.901	91.29	15.14	30-130	26-130	-.253
CT							

Table 2 shows Cronbach alpha reliability of narrative transportation scale, emotional intelligence and critical thinking. The reliability analysis indicates that the narrative transportation, emotional intelligence and critical thinking scale are internally consistent as the alpha coefficient reliability of the scales ranges from .788 to .901 which is good. The skewness and kurtosis of all scales is within the range.

Table 3

Pearson product correlation among fictional reading, emotional intelligence and critical thinking (N=360)

	FR	EI	CT
FR	-	.418**	.416**
EI		-	.629**

CT

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Table 4

Simple Linear Regression Predicting effect of fictional reading, emotional intelligence and critical thinking (N=360)

Variables	β	S.E	B	95% CI		R ²	ΔR^2	F
				UL	LL			
Constant		4.323	9.183	17.68	.681		.418	128.36
						.421		
FR	.194	.060	.264	.383	.145			
CT	.543	.049	.598	.695	.502			

Note: B=Standardized coefficient, SE= Standard error, β = Standardized non-coefficient, UL= Upper limit, LL= Lower limit

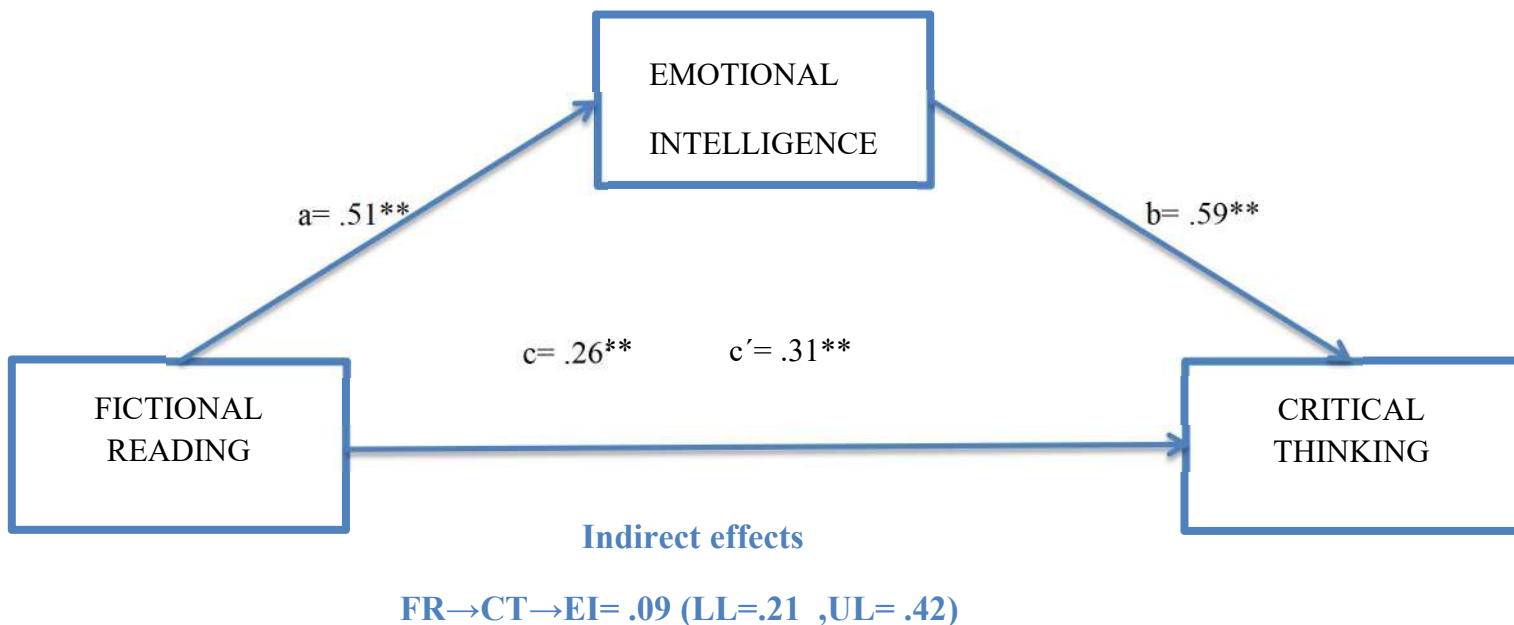
Table 4 illustrates a multiple linear regression analysis conducted to examine the effects of FR (fictional reading) and CT (critical thinking) on the outcome variable(emotional intelligence) in 360 participants. The model significantly predicts the outcome variable, $F(2,360) = 128.36$, $p < 0.001$, accounting for 41.8% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.418$). Both FR ($\beta = 0.194$, $p < 0.01$) and CT ($\beta = 0.543$, $p < 0.001$) were found to be significant predictors of the outcome variable. The positive beta values indicate that higher levels of FR and CR are associated with higher levels of the outcome. Among the two, CR emerged as the stronger predictor due to its higher standardized beta coefficient. This model highlights the significant role of both FR and CR in predicting the outcome, with CT showing a stronger influence.

Table 5

Mean, Standard Deviation and t- values showing readers and non-readers differences among emotional intelligence and critical thinking (N=300)

Readers		Non-Readers						
(n=299)		(n=301)						
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	LL	UL
EI	79.2	14.4	75.5	18.4	1.96	.050	-.0077	7.49
CT	94.4	14.5	87.6	15.4	3.89	.000	3.33	10.15

Table 7 shows the results of an independent sample t-test conducted to compare fictional readers and non-reader participants measures of emotional intelligence and critical thinking. The results indicate that there is significant difference between the mean scores of fictional readers and non-readers participants on both variables. For emotional intelligence and critical thinking, fictional readers scored slightly higher than non-readers. However, the difference is statistically significant.



Conclusion

In conclusion, this study serves as a significant contribution to our comprehension of the complex factors that influence critical thinking and emotional intelligence among individuals. By examining the interplay between fictional reading, emotional intelligence and critical thinking, the research shed light on the positive aspects of mental well-being.

The finding highlights the pivotal role of fictional reading in fortifying the positive traits in individuals. By promoting fictional narrative, it can enhance critical thinking and emotional intelligence in individuals which can further make them productive and help them to effectively move in their academic, personal and professional settings. Moreover, the study's revelation regarding the potential benefits of engaging fictional narrative as high emotional intelligence and critical thinking then those who are not involved in fictional reading.

In the light of these insights, my research suggested that these efforts have the potential to foster positive in academic and personal outcomes. By integrating narrative fiction in academia can effectively brings positive traits in individuals. Not only academia but also helps in personal and professional relationships.



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