

# Emotional Intelligence, Learning Motivation, and Social-Emotional Learning among University Students

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## Abstract

Education plays a central role in preparing students to face the changes and complexities of the environment. Society and students' life experiences have significantly transformed in the last century. Emotional intelligence, communication skills, and adaptability are important for university students. Thus, the main objective of this research was to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and social-emotional learning competencies among university students. The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test, the Work Preference Inventory, and the Social-Emotional Competence Questionnaire were administered to a sample of 250 university students. The results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between the level of emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and the subdimensions of social-emotional competencies. Students' social-emotional competencies had the highest rating in self-awareness, social awareness, and self-management, while relationship management and responsible decision-making had lower levels. Simultaneously, there was a significant difference between the scores on social-emotional competencies and gender, but there was no difference between emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and gender. The study concluded that promoting students' emotional intelligence, learning motivation, social-emotional learning, and enhancing students' performance in the new technological world is a global issue.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, learning motivation, social-emotional learning, higher education institutions, management

## Introduction

Education plays a central role in preparing students to face the changes and complexities of the environment (Yusri et al., 2020). Students need to adapt to the development of science and technology. Emotional intelligence, communication skills, and adaptability are important for university students (Abdullah et al., 2019). It is hoped that with good education and support in developing skills and abilities, students can achieve better learning results and be ready to face future challenges with confidence. Education that prioritizes the development of emotional and intellectual intelligence will make a positive contribution to the progress of individual students and society as a whole.

To achieve the goals of good education, the government and society need to work hard to overcome these problems. Apart from focusing on intellectual intelligence, educational institutions also need to pay attention to the emotional intelligence of students (Baan, 2022). Emotional intelligence has never been as important as it is in current society. Emotional intelligence involves the ability to manage emotions, empathize, and have social skills. By paying attention to emotional intelligence, education can make a holistic contribution to forming intellectually competent individuals.

Emotional intelligence and motivation to learn in students is that the academic success and personal development of students is strongly influenced by the ability to manage emotions and maintain high learning motivation (Arias et al., 2022). Students with good emotional intelligence are more likely to have good academic experiences that positively influence their academic motivation.

Emotional intelligence, learning motivation, the ability to collaborate, adaptability, and resilience are increasingly recognized as critical skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The implementation of social-emotional learning at university is not without its challenges. It requires a comprehensive approach, involving curriculum design, teacher training, and the creation of a supportive university culture (Chiara, 2020). The journey of integrating social-emotional learning into the educational framework is complex and multifaceted, but the outcomes – resilient, empathetic, and emotionally intelligent students – are invaluable for the future of society.

## Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence has a major function in decreasing worry (Zysberg & Zisberg, 2022), promoting positive mental states (Mohamed et al., 2022), and helping people to better adapt to challenging social environments. Emotional intelligence also has a positive effect on students' ability to control their own emotions, recognize the emotions of others, maintain a good state of mind, and take appropriate actions (Tam et al., 2021).

Our educational system tends to prioritize academic skills by understanding emotional intelligence, even though emotional well-being is as crucial as mathematical or reading abilities, requiring a distinct set of competencies. According to Almanazh Suswandi et al. (2023), students with high emotional intelligence are more adapted to utilizing emotions effectively in their studies, empathizing with peers and teachers, attentively absorbing information during class, promptly completing tasks, working independently, demonstrating enthusiasm for learning, and having clear learning

objectives without external pressure. It seems that emotional intelligence is crucial in students' lives.

## Learning motivation

Motivation plays a crucial role in developing education among learners. Motivation in education can have several effects on how students learn and how they behave toward the subjects (Ince et al., 2020). Motivation implies the students' energy and drive to learn, work hard, and achieve success at university. Students learn more when they are creating their learning opportunities.

Learning motivation is the internal drive or desire to engage in and sustain efforts toward learning activities. It is the reason or set of reasons that individuals are motivated to pursue, persist in, and complete learning tasks or educational goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Learning motivation can be influenced by factors such as personal interest, the perceived value of the material, self-efficacy (belief in one's ability), and the external rewards or outcomes that result from learning.

Learning motivation has been identified as the key psychological ability that motivates students to value learning, focus on learning strategies, and regulate learning engagement, and it involves both autonomous decisions and internal influence (Litalien et al., 2017). In addition, learning motivation can be understood as an emotional experience when learning and good academic motivation in college students, and requires positive emotions as a foundation. When university students can identify and control their negative emotions in the face of learning difficulties, they are likely to adopt more effective learning styles and thus experience more positive learning motivation. When a student is emotionally satisfied, he or she may have a more positive and optimistic attitude toward learning (Ding, 2022). Motivation to learn is not only energy to move students to learn, but also something that directs students' activities toward a learning goal.

## Social-emotional learning

The goal of education goes beyond acquiring knowledge. It is to prepare the new generation to become a generation of well-adapted, dynamic, and challenging people in the world. One approach that takes a holistic view of growing and developing effective members of future societies who are also well-balanced and well-adapted is that of social-emotional learning. Social-emotional learning describes the mindsets, skills, attitudes, and feelings that contribute to students' success at school, in their careers, and life, such as achieving growth and a sense of belonging at school (Bailey et al., 2023). Social-emotional learning is an important part of a well-rounded education.

Social-emotional learning refers to the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020). It encompasses a wide range of skills and attitudes, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are crucial not only for academic success but also for the overall well-being and future readiness of students.

Social-emotional learning creates a more dynamic and responsive learning environment, where students are better equipped to analyze complex situations, make

informed decisions, and interact effectively with others. However, social-emotional learning actively promotes a culture of respect, inclusivity, and kindness.

## Emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and social-emotional learning

Education is one of the largest application areas for the construct of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to a set of hierarchically organized core competencies and skills for identifying, expressing, processing, and regulating emotions, both in oneself and others. Higher levels of emotional intelligence are associated with a variety of general positive intrapersonal outcomes. These outcomes include greater subjective well-being, assessed through indices such as positive affect, life satisfaction, and better mental health.

According to Amador-Licona et al. (2020), someone with good emotional intelligence is usually able to maintain their motivation and social-emotional competencies in learning even when they face obstacles and stress. They can regulate emotions and channel them positively in achieving academic goals. In addition, they tend to be better able to establish good relationships with peers and teachers, who can be a source of social support in the learning process.

The combination of emotional intelligence, strong learning motivation, and adequate social-emotional learning can help students to be more diligent, more persistent, and overcome various obstacles that may arise during the learning process. They are also more active in seeking information, exploring deeper knowledge, and participating in learning activities. Moreover, young people learn to be self-confident, develop skills in maintaining positive relationships, and deal with life's challenges effectively (Rodríguez-González et al., 2021).

Hence, the main goal of this study was to examine the possible relationship between emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and social emotional learning among university students.

## Research methodology

### *Participants*

The sample of students was randomly selected, and all participants volunteered. The participants included 250 university students aged between 20-22 years. The mean calculated age of the students was 20.65 (SD=4.66). Of all participants, 125 were female (50%) and 125 were male (50%). The study group of the research included third-year students who studied medical sciences and psychology at the University of Tetova.

### *Data collection tools*

#### *The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT)*

The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), developed by Schutte et al. (1998), was used to measure emotional intelligence levels. The scale was composed of 33 items. It is a 5-point Likert-type scale. According to the sum scores, the total score ranges from 33 to 165, where higher scores indicate a higher level of emotional

intelligence. The internal coefficient of consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) was .832 for this study.

#### *The Work Preference Inventory (WPI)*

Learning motivation was measured using a questionnaire adopted from the Work Preference Inventory Scale developed by Amabile et al. (1994). The questionnaire includes 28 positively and 2 negatively scored questions, totaling 30 questions, using a 4-point Likert scale, such as the item "I like to think independently to solve difficult problems". The higher score indicated a high rate of learning motivation. The Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.802 in the present investigation.

#### *The Social-Emotional Competence Questionnaire (SECO)*

The scale developed by Zhou and Ee (2012) was used by the participants. The scale aiming to determine social-emotional competence is composed of 25 items, five each to assess: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship management, and responsible decision-making. The total score was the sum of all five domain scores. The minimum and maximum scores for each domain were 5 and 25, respectively, with an overall range from 25 to 125. In this questionnaire, five Cronbach's alpha coefficients were all higher than .7, indicating that the internal reliability of each first-level indicator of the questionnaire was high.

#### *Data procedure and data analysis*

Data collection tools were administered by the researchers during the spring semester of the academic year 2023/24. Each respondent was personally invited to complete a paper-and-pencil version of the questionnaire. The period for answering the scale was 50 minutes.

The statistical analysis of the results obtained in the research was conducted with SPSS 20.0 for the Windows package program. Based on the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, significance (p) of .002 was obtained for the emotional intelligence scale, significance (p) of .003 was obtained on work preference inventory and significance (p) of .000 on the questionnaire for social-emotional competences, so it can be concluded from the normality results in this study that the three variables showed that the data is not normally distributed. The mean score and standard deviations were estimated as descriptive statistics. The correlation between the variables of emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and social-emotional competencies was analyzed by using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. When comparing the differences in university students' scores in these scales according to gender, an analysis of the Mann-Whitney U test was used in this study.

## Results

In our study, we observed that the mean rate of emotional intelligence was  $M=142.24$  ( $SD=14.68$ ), while the mean rate of learning motivation was  $M=98.24$  ( $SD=8.68$ ). Notably, the overall score for the participants in social-emotional competencies was  $M=82.81$  ( $SD=14.05$ ). Also, the students' social-emotional competencies had the highest rating in self-awareness ( $M=21.64$ ,  $SD=9.64$ ), social awareness ( $M=18.59$ ,  $SD=8.56$ ), and self-management ( $M=18.21$ ,  $SD=8.34$ ). The dimensions rated at the lowest level

included relationship management ( $M=14.32$ ,  $SD=6.54$ ) and responsible decision-making ( $M=10.12$ ,  $SD=4.31$ ). There was a positive, but negligible relationship between emotional intelligence and learning motivation ( $r_s=.234$ ,  $p<.01$ ), moderate positive correlation between emotional intelligence and self-awareness ( $r_s=.432$ ,  $p<.01$ ), negligible positive correlation between social awareness ( $r_s=.072$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and weak positive correlation between self-management ( $r_s=.328$ ,  $p<.01$ ), but strong negative correlation between emotional intelligence and relationship management ( $r_s=-.654$ ,  $p>.01$ ) and negligible negative correlation between emotional intelligence and responsible decision-making ( $r_s=-.261$ ,  $p>.01$ ). Regarding the relationship between learning motivation and social-emotional competencies subscales, the following results are presented: learning motivation and self-awareness ( $r_s=.041$ ,  $p<.01$ ), social awareness ( $r_s=.213$ ,  $p<.01$ ), self-management ( $r_s=-.347$ ,  $p>.01$ ), relationship management ( $r_s=.614$ ,  $p>.01$ ), and responsible decision-making ( $r_s=-.452$ ,  $p>.01$ ).

The results indicated that there were significant differences between the scores on social-emotional competencies between male and female students. Female students had higher mean scores in two of five subscales of social-emotional competencies, namely self-awareness and self-management ( $z=-4.321$ ,  $p=.000$  and  $z=-3.235$ ,  $p=.003$ ), while the boys had higher mean scores in one of the social-emotional competencies, that is, social awareness ( $z=-5.621$ ,  $p=.000$ ). No significant gender differences were found about the emotional intelligence and learning motivation.

## Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and various subscales of social-emotional competencies. Based on the results of the data analysis, we found that there is a positive, but negligible correlation between emotional intelligence and learning motivation. Emotional intelligence may have a small influence on an individual's motivation to learn, which aligns with previous research suggesting that emotional intelligence skills, such as emotions, can influence motivation (Dominguez-Alonso et al., 2016).

Also, we found that emotional intelligence and learning motivation have some influence on social-emotional competencies, but the strength and significance of these relationships vary across different subscales. The results suggest that emotional intelligence plays a more substantial role in self-awareness and self-management, while learning motivation has a more complex relationship with the social-emotional competencies assessed in this study. This research makes an important contribution to understanding the importance of developing emotional intelligence and increasing students' learning motivation and social-emotional learning in the educational environment.

Based on this study and perspective, emotional intelligence plays an important role in human activity, including passion and self-motivation (Chang & Tsai, 2022). In the context of learning, emotional intelligence allows students to be able to motivate themselves inside and outside of the classroom. Research shows that individuals with good emotional intelligence are often highly motivated to learn. The student who has higher emotional intelligence is more likely to succeed in learning and has the motivation to achieve to produce good learning achievement. With learning motivation, students will be motivated to achieve learning goals and objectives (Pishghadam et al., 2022).

Learning motivation is very important because it can move student behavior in a positive direction, so that they can deal with all the demands and difficulties of learning.

Social-emotional learning competencies for students involve knowledge, skills, and attitudes in five domains: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These five domains are a set of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies that are interconnected and related to students' academic and social competencies in all grade levels (Everett & Oswald, 2018). Based on the results of our study, we can see that the students had a high level of self-awareness and social awareness, being clear about their thoughts and understanding their motivation and emotions. They could accurately identify others' emotions by observing facial expressions and easily comprehend the reasons behind others' emotions. Furthermore, the participants demonstrated a relatively stable performance in self-management. They were able to stay calm in the face of stress, navigate new or challenging situations while overcoming anxiety, and effectively control their emotions in unfavorable circumstances.

Female students who are more self-aware and confident about their learning abilities are likely to persevere and tend to perform better, so they are likely to manage their stress and organize their work better. On the other hand, male students had a high level of social awareness, so they have a high ability to take perspective and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures (West et al., 2020). So, social-emotional learning equips students with the necessary competencies to deal effectively with the various tasks and challenges of their daily life, leading to increased satisfaction and performance. In our study, we found that there were no gender-based differences in the total emotional intelligence and learning motivation scores. This phenomenon has been explained in other studies, which state that female students have a higher level of emotional intelligence and motivation to learn than boys (Rodríguez-González et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

This study investigates the relationship between emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and social-emotional learning among university students. Based on the foregoing results, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and social-emotional learning are related, i.e., good emotional intelligence will influence students' level of motivation and social-emotional competencies. The learnable, measurable skills of emotional intelligence are correlated with increased academic achievement, better health, stronger relationships, greater self-efficacy, and improved quality of life.

Research findings suggest that motivation to learn and skills related to social-emotional learning result in overall success in life, both personally and professionally (Trigueros et al., 2019). Social-emotional learning creates a solid foundation for students' ability to learn effectively. Social-emotional learning competencies assist in academic learning and enhance student learning through students' interaction with others by making effective connections to the course curriculum.

Society and students' life experiences have transformed significantly in the last century. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, universities need to deliver a holistic educational experience to students that includes an opportunity to learn and apply social-emotional learning

competencies to ensure successful and productive lives (Tang & Weiguang, 2023). This is particularly important in higher education.

Promoting students' motivation, social-emotional learning, and enhancing their performance in the new technological world is a global issue. We found that university students' emotional intelligence positively predicted their learning motivation and social-emotional learning competencies, thereby further expanding the research in this field.

These findings make a practical contribution to showing how emotional intelligence can be used to promote motivation and social-emotional learning at the crossroads. This research provides a clear understanding of the need for systematic intervention to promote university students' motivation and social-emotional learning. Our study findings can act as a reference for policymakers and practitioners to better implement emotional intelligence interventions and promote academic performance.

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