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Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance Among College Students: A Quantitative Analysis

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a vital concept in education, serving as the central focus of this study. EI is defined as the ability to effectively manage and express emotions with empathy while being acutely aware of their impact on interpersonal relationships. This study aims to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance among undergraduate students. A sample of 200 participants was utilized to examine how five dimensions of EI—intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and general mood—correlate with both cumulative GPA and high school GPA. The results revealed statistically significant correlations between specific EI domains and academic performance, particularly highlighting the critical roles of stress management and general mood. These findings reinforce existing research suggesting that students with strong emotional intelligence skills tend to achieve better academic and extracurricular outcomes. Additionally, our study identified a significant gap in educational programs aimed at developing, supporting, and sustaining emotional intelligence within universities. We also examined demographic variables, including sex, age, and ethnicity, to assess their impact on differences among subgroups and their relationship with college retention. The findings carry practical implications for both educators and students, providing valuable insights that can inform the integration of EI competencies into academic support strategies in higher education, ultimately enhancing student success and well-being.

Keywords Emotional Intelligence (EI), Stress Management, Student Success, Research

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1.0. Introduction

Success and fulfillment in life are not solely determined by intelligence (Doğru, 2023). Many individuals with high academic prowess may struggle with social interactions and workplace dynamics (Han et al., 2022). While a high IQ can lead to prestigious opportunities, it is often emotional intelligence (EQ) that enables us to form meaningful relationships and navigate complexities (Jain et al., 2018). IQ and EQ work together to enhance cognitive and emotional skills. When harmonized, they lay a strong foundation for lasting success and personal satisfaction. By balancing these two intelligences, we empower ourselves to achieve fulfillment in both personal and professional realms (Luna et al., 2019). Emotional intelligence (EI) is not just a skill, but a transformative tool for college students. It empowers them to effectively manage and express emotions with empathy, while being acutely aware of their impact on interpersonal relationships (Yang & Tu, 2021). This crucial skill set has increasingly been recognized as a significant predictor of success across various domains, particularly in the realm of education. For college students navigating the complexities of academic life, EI can play a transformative role, influencing not just their social interactions but also their academic performance and achievements (Doğru, 2023; Han et al., 2022).

Enhanced emotional intelligence is not just a skill, but a potential catalyst for fostering essential qualities in students. It has the potential to foster qualities such as motivation, self-regulation, and coping mechanisms to handle stress (Bai, Nie, & Lee, 2022). These attributes can significantly enhance a student's ability to focus, endure challenges, and recover from setbacks, thereby forming a resilient foundation for academic success (de Bruyn, 2023). Students endowed with higher EI levels are often more attuned to their emotional states, enabling them to manage the pressures of academia with greater effectiveness (Salih et al., 2024). Such students are also more inclined to seek assistance, when necessary, cultivate positive relationships with their peers and instructors, and contribute to creating an encouraging learning atmosphere—all of which can further facilitate their academic success (Hamid, 2025; Salih et al., 2024).

It is important to note that while numerous studies illustrate a notable correlation between EI and grade point average (GPA), indicating that students who exhibit higher emotional intelligence tend to persevere and excel academically, research findings are not uniformly supportive (Ye et al., 2024). Some studies, however, have discovered minimal correlations between EI and academic performance (Doğru, 2023). These discrepancies suggest that myriad factors—such as cognitive abilities, socioeconomic status, and the level of institutional support—might exert a more significant influence depending on the context (Salih et al., 2024). This complexity underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the role of EI in academic success (Martinez & Ruiz, 2024; Ye et al., 2024).

Moreover, a critical concern remains regarding self-reporting biases in EI evaluations (Rossier, 2014; Thorndike, & Stein, 1937). Students might, whether intentionally or unintentionally, overestimate their emotional competencies due to social desirability biases, which are tendencies for individuals to present themselves in a favorable light, or a limited capacity for accurate self-reflection. This points to the necessity for more objective or multi-informant measures to validate self-reported EI and deepen our understanding of its predictive validity across varied populations (Gupta et al., 2017). Further complicating the picture is the notable gap in current research regarding which specific facets of EI are most strongly linked to academic outcomes, underlining the imperative for continued exploration in this area (Gupta et al., 2017; Zhoc et al., 2017).

Demographic factors, such as gender, ethnicity, and academic major, have been shown to influence the relationship between emotional intelligence and educational outcomes (Collie, 2022). For instance, female students typically report higher scores in interpersonal emotional intelligence. This gender difference may stem from socialization practices that promote emotional expressiveness and relational sensitivity (Alon-Barkat & Busuioc, 2022). These interpersonal strengths contribute to the development of crucial skills, such as communication, empathy, and conflict resolution, which are essential in both academic and professional settings (Yang & Tu, 2021). Similarly, students in helping professions, such as nursing and social work, typically exhibit higher levels of empathy and emotional awareness, reflecting the significant role of their training in developing these competencies (Graves & Reinke, 2021). These fields emphasize understanding others' emotions, managing sensitive client interactions, and maintaining professional composure, all of which contribute to the cultivation of greater emotional intelligence over time (Alon-Barkat & Busuioc, 2022; Jiang et al., 2021).

Furthermore, this study highlights the need for further exploration of EI and personal relationships (Yang, & Tu, 2021). For instance, older students often bring valuable life experiences that enhance emotional maturity, self-awareness, and stress management abilities, potentially improving their academic resilience. Additionally, students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds may develop greater cultural responsiveness and adaptive

emotional strategies as they navigate educational environments that are not always inclusive or equitable (Burrus et al., 2022). These adaptive skills can lead to stronger interpersonal relationships, a greater sense of belonging, and increased engagement—all of which are critical for academic retention and graduation (Moody et al., 2022). In light of the growing focus on student retention and success in higher education, our study examines how various aspects of emotional intelligence impact GPA and college retention among a diverse student population. This research aims to pave the way for future studies in this critical field (Burrus et al., 2022; Graves & Reinke, 2021).

2.0. Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to explore research related to emotional intelligence (EI) and its impact on college student success. More specifically, the review examined the following areas: EI in college students, the relationship between EI and academic performance, and the connection between EI and student engagement (Soria & Stubblefield, 2014). In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) within the realm of higher education (Han et al., 2022). Emotional intelligence, commonly understood as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions while also empathizing with the feelings of others, is gaining recognition for its profound impact on student success (Bai et al., 2022). As college students face the myriad challenges of independent learning—ranging from academic pressures to social adjustments—educational institutions are becoming increasingly committed to ensuring that their students not only succeed but also remain engaged and enrolled throughout their academic journey (Akkaraju et al., 2019; Bai et al., 2022).

Historically, the critical link between emotional intelligence and student success has often been underestimated (Thorndike & Stein, 1937). However, contemporary research has begun to illuminate a compelling connection, revealing a direct correlation between a student's level of emotional intelligence and their likelihood of persistence in their studies (Edgar et al., 2019). The alarming decline in student retention rates has emerged as a pressing concern for higher education administrators, prompting them to explore various innovative programs aimed at fostering an environment where college students can thrive, stay engaged, and maintain their commitment to their studies (Bai et al., 2022). To address this issue, educational leaders are proactively developing targeted programs designed to enhance emotional intelligence among students (Alon-Barkat & Busuioc, 2022). Such initiatives hold significant promise not only for promoting student success but also for fostering long-term retention and improving the overall educational experience (Burrus, et al, 2022; Flanders, 2017).

The college student population is diverse, and institutions are focused on enhancing student success. This transitional phase between childhood and adulthood prompts students to seek deeper meaning and happiness (Vela et al., 2018). One effective way to support this journey is through emotional intelligence (EI), which includes motivation, empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills (Yang & Tu, 2021). Research shows that counselors play a vital role in nurturing students' emotional growth by fostering hope and self-efficacy, key components of EI (Vela et al., 2018). Moreover, students who learn to manage stress and emotions tend to achieve better academically (Villanueva et al., 2017). By placing a strong emphasis on emotional intelligence and providing robust counseling support, colleges can foster an environment that nurtures not only academic achievement but also holistic well-being and personal growth (Vela et al., 2018). This approach encourages students to develop self-awareness, resilience, and strong interpersonal skills, ultimately shaping them into well-rounded individuals poised for success in all areas of life (Villanueva et al., 2017; Yang & Tu, 2021).

The relevant literature highlighted five key areas of emotional intelligence (EI) that support motivation: empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills (Goleman et al., 2013). Motivation is linked to increased prosocial behavior among students, which in turn leads to improved academic outcomes (Collie, 2022). The studies of Jiang et al. (2021) found that empathy and prosocial behavior play a significant role in the success of college students. Self-awareness involves understanding oneself and recognizing how to relate effectively to others. Enhancements in this area contribute to academic growth and collaboration (Campbell et al., 2022). Self-regulation includes behaviors such as planning, monitoring, controlling, and reflecting, and has been studied for its connection to the psychological well-being of college students (Wang et al., 2020). Ultimately, social skills are crucial for college students, as they influence various aspects of the student experience (Hilton et al., 2022). Strong emotional intelligence skills are often associated with greater motivation, empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, and success in social interactions (Collie, 2022; Goleman, 2013).

2.1. Motivation

Motivation stands as a pivotal emotional intelligence skill, profoundly influencing a college student's ability to thrive both academically and socially (Jiang et al., 2021). A growing body of research indicates that intrinsic motivation is a robust predictor of student achievement, serving as a powerful internal drive that propels individuals toward their educational goals (Matheka et al., 2020). The studies of Edgar et al. (2019) underscore the significant connection between a student's innate motivation and their self-belief, noting that these intertwined factors powerfully shape their pathways to success, particularly during the often tumultuous first-year experience (Campbell et al., 2022; Matheka et al., 2020).

Cultivating a positive mindset and resilience emerges as a vital component in this journey. Motivated students tend to take the initiative, actively seeking out opportunities and diligently setting learning objectives, often regardless of the levels of support they receive from peers (O'Connell et al., 2022). In her recent studies, Collie (2022) found that positive motivation acts as a catalyst for student success, whereas negative motivation can serve as a detrimental force, undermining potential achievements. Furthermore, the necessity of maintaining consistent motivation cannot be overstated, particularly when adapting to the multifaceted demands of college life (Matheka et al., 2020). This highlights the critical importance of sustaining motivation, not only for navigating academic challenges but also for fostering overall success in the college experience (Collie, 2022; Edgar et al., 2019)

2.2. Empathy

Empathy is a vital aspect of emotional intelligence (EI) that significantly impacts the success of college students (O'Connell, et al., 2022). Colleges have actively worked to enhance these skills (Brunero et al., 2022). Research involving 136 college students demonstrated that emotional empathy enhanced personal well-being and reduced attachment avoidance among peers (Yang & Tu, 2021). A larger study by Jiang et al. (2021) surveyed 898 students and found that positive, pro-social environments fostered empathy. This suggests that enhancing empathy can aid academic success. Similarly, Yang and Tu (2021) highlighted the role of empathy in building interpersonal relationships among Chinese college students, thereby contributing to a supportive campus atmosphere (Brunero et al., 2022; Yang & Tu, 2021).

Moreover, the stressors encountered during college can hurt both academic performance and overall well-being (O'Connell, et al., 2022). The studies of Prosek et al. (2022) demonstrated that teaching students coping strategies focused on empathy effectively reduced stress. Emphasizing educational strategies that nurture empathy can lead to improved experiences and greater success for college students (Bass et al., 2023). College courses that foster authentic empathy in students enhance their understanding of others' needs and have lasting impacts beyond college (Bassette et al., 2021). Immersive experiences improve empathy and engagement, benefiting personal and professional lives. Guerra-Bustamante et al. (2019) highlighted the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in student success, linking empathy and self-awareness to greater satisfaction and achievement. Successful students are typically self-believing and emotionally secure (Bass et al., 2023; Edgar et al., 2019).

Empathy and interdisciplinarity are essential in various fields. Hutchison (2016) explored how creative thinking and collaborative learning enhance communication, critical thinking, and empathy. Brunero et al. (2022) called for increased empathy education to support undergraduate success. Graves and Reinke (2021) argued that empathy should be a core skill in curricula, while Zhoc et al., (2019) identified a troubling shift among college students towards valuing extrinsic goals, such as wealth and fame, which diminishes empathy and community engagement. This highlights the urgent need for educational programs promoting empathetic behavior (Brunero et al., 2022; Graves and Reinke, 2021).

2.3. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness in learning is crucial for higher education administrators and students (Zhoc et al., 2019). Research highlights the need for programs that foster self-directed learning and emotional intelligence (EI), emphasizing that regulating positive emotions is key to success. Interventions focused on self-awareness, such as collaborative group work, have shown significant benefits for college students, enhancing their ability to adapt both academically and socially (Trigueros et al., 2019). A study on 238 students using the Self-Awareness Questionnaire revealed positive outcomes from university-implemented self-awareness programs, with students reporting increased happiness, contentment, and optimism after training (Kim & Patterson, 2016; Zhoc et al., 2019).

Self-awareness is vital for preventing burnout in students and promoting self-care (Ouliaris, 2019). Ouliaris emphasizes that enhancing self-awareness is key to student success and fulfilling careers. Research by Ghita-Pirnuta and Cismaru (2022) supports the integration of emotional intelligence (EI) modules into curricula to boost self-awareness through self-reflection exercises and group discussions. Self-awareness, which involves understanding oneself and one's actions, helps students learn more effectively and self-direct their growth (Ghita-Pirnuta and Cismaru, 2022; Zhoc et al., 2019). It enables students to advocate for themselves and fuels their motivation throughout their educational journey. Knowles (1995) describes self-directed learning as a process where individuals identify their learning needs and establish goals (Zhoc et al., 2017). Self-aware students can monitor their progress, make necessary adjustments, and develop resilience to adapt to challenges in higher education, ultimately enhancing their ability to achieve personal and academic goals (Trigueros et al., 2019; Zhoc et al., 2017).

2.4. Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is crucial for academic success and is linked to mindfulness and mental health (MacDonald, 2021). Notably, MacDonald (2020) conducted a study involving 278 undergraduate college students to examine the relationships between dispositional mindfulness, challenges in emotion regulation, and skills related to delayed gratification. The study concluded that higher levels of self-regulation have a significant influence on social, emotional, and academic performance. Furthermore, Wibrowski et al. (2016) examined 739 students and discovered that those with better self-regulation exhibited higher motivation, improved study skills, and better academic performance. This study highlighted the role of emotional intelligence in helping students manage stress and cope with challenges. Sun and Lyu (2022) surveyed 800 university students and found that emotional intelligence promotes positive self-regulation, assisting students to adopt effective coping strategies. Their results showed that strong self-regulation aids in managing emotions and enhances performance in various situations, like internships and job interactions (MacDonald, 2020; Sun and Lyu, 2022).

Self-regulation fosters adaptability and emotional resilience, enabling students to experience emotions that contribute to their overall happiness (Sun and Lyu, 2022). It helps them resist impulsive urges and choose effective learning strategies, leading to quicker processing of information and greater self-reliance (Bass et al., 2023). In 2008, Goleman advocated for the implementation of a comprehensive 60-item Self-Report Measure of Emotional Intelligence (SRMEI) scale as an effective tool for assessing individuals' emotional intelligence (Goleman et al., 2013). This approach has gained traction in educational contexts, particularly in light of recent research conducted by Wibrowski et al. (2016). Their study revealed a notable correlation among college students: those who experienced a surge in academic self-regulation and motivation also reported achieving heightened success in their educational pursuits (Bass et al., 2023; Wibrowski et al., 2016).

Furthermore, a significant investigation by Naz and Khan (2018), which involved a robust sample size of 2,600 students, utilized the SRMEI scale to explore the association between emotional intelligence and emotional self-regulation. The findings illuminated the characteristics of the ideal student, who demonstrates the ability to self-regulate by consistently making intentional, positive choices and leveraging strong interpersonal skills. These attributes, the study affirmed, are cultivated through the mastery of emotional intelligence skills, underscoring the profound impact of EI on academic and personal success (Naz & Khan, 2018; Wibrowski et al., 2016).

2.5. Social Skills

In recent years, emotional intelligence and social skills have become vital for student success (Ghita-Pirnuta & Cismaru, 2022). Colleges have a responsibility to enhance these skills, as they help address mental health challenges among students (Moeller & Seehuus, 2019). Studies show that institutions can support students with poor social skills through targeted interventions (Vidal et al., 2022). College is a key time for social interaction, and a study by Campbell et al. (2022) found a link between poor social skills and increased loneliness and mental health issues among students. Those with low social skills are more prone to anxiety, stress, and depression, negatively affecting their academic performance (Hilton et al., 2022). Therefore, improving social skills should be a priority, as students with strong social skills tend to enjoy a more positive university experience and better well-being (Hilton et al., 2022; Moeller & Seehuus, 2019).

Friendship groups play a pivotal role in alleviating loneliness and improving academic performance among students. Students often rely on their friends for support, which in turn reduces social withdrawal (Campbell, 2022). The cultivation of supportive friendships and the expansion of social networks are, therefore, crucial for enhancing

overall well-being. These social networks, built on trust and understanding, are invaluable resources for students. Moeller and Seehuus (2019) delved into the relationship between loneliness, social skills, anxiety, and depression among college students. Their study, based on a diverse sample of 2,054 students, revealed a significant finding: enhanced social skills are positively correlated with greater academic success (Ghita-Pirnuta & Cismaru, 2022; Moeller and Seehuus, 2019).

Chapin (2015) emphasizes the importance of social skills in enhancing the college experience. In a study of 26,612 Chinese students by She et al. (2023), improved social skills were found to be associated with reduced social anxiety, resulting in better academic and social outcomes. Naz and Khan (2018) conducted a comprehensive assessment of the social skills and emotional intelligence of over 3,500 students. Their findings underscore the importance of emotional stability and openness in facilitating better emotional control and more positive social interactions. Conversely, those with low emotional stability were found to be more susceptible to anxiety, further emphasizing the significance of these traits in college life (Naz and Khan, 2018; She et al., 2023),

Emotional intelligence (EI) has a significant influence on various aspects of student life, particularly on academic performance (She et al., 2023). Developing EI skills is a strong predictor of academic success, emphasizing the deep connection between emotional awareness and educational achievement. Research by Halimi et al. (2020) highlights this relationship, showing that students with higher levels of EI tend to achieve better academic results. This finding underscores the crucial role of higher education administrators and educators in integrating EI into their educational programs. By doing so, they can equip students with essential emotional intelligence skills, a necessity to enhance their academic performance and overall success in an increasingly competitive environment (Halimi et al., 2020; Wibrowski et al., 2016).

In a comprehensive study by Nastasa et al. (2022), two well-structured investigations examined the complex relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance. The research included 594 undergraduate students—367 in the first study and 227 in the second—and reported the findings. The key findings revealed that students who excel academically demonstrate significantly stronger EI skills. These students showed better emotional management and social navigation, achieving a noticeably higher GPA compared to their peers with less developed emotional understanding (Nastasa et al., 2022). These insights underscore the crucial role that EI plays in promoting student success within the academic environment (Han et al., 2022; Nastasa et al., 2022).

3.0. Methods

A diverse sample of 200 undergraduate students, carefully selected through convenience sampling from a mid-sized university, served as the foundation of the present study. This sample, representing a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences, participated in a comprehensive Emotional Intelligence (EI) inventory and shared self-reported data regarding their Grade Point Averages (GPA) and retention status. The sample was predominantly female, with an impressive 83% representation, and most participants identified as African American or Black. The sample was representative of the university`s population (Lawson et al., 2019). The students, representing a diverse range of academic disciplines, including social work, nursing, psychology, and engineering, are a testament to the university's commitment to a multifaceted educational environment. The age distribution of the participants was primarily composed of traditional-age students ranging from 18 to 24 years old, with a valuable cohort of adult learners that added depth to the sample.

The participants in the study came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, with a significant majority identifying as African American. In terms of academic persistence, approximately 88% of participants reported continuing their enrollment from the previous term, indicating a strong commitment to their studies. This research study utilized a cross-sectional, correlational design over a focused four-week period (DeCarlo et al., 2021). Participants completed a comprehensive 133-item self-report Emotional Intelligence Scale and provided their current and high school GPAs, as well as demographic information and enrollment statuses (Bar-On, 2014). To ensure confidentiality, the data collection process was conducted anonymously, prioritizing the privacy and security of all participants throughout the study (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). This careful approach allowed for a thorough examination of the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance within a diverse student population. Emotional intelligence (EI) was assessed using the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) framework, a widely respected self-report instrument that evaluates emotional and social functioning (Bar-On, 2014; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

The EQ-i generates five composite scores that encapsulate essential dimensions of emotional intelligence:

1. Intrapersonal – The capacity to understand and articulate one's own emotions, encompassing self-awareness, assertiveness, and self-regard.
2. Interpersonal – The ability to empathize, engage in social responsibility, and foster interpersonal relationships.
3. Stress Management – The proficiency in managing stress and regulating impulses effectively, which includes stress tolerance and emotional regulation.
4. Adaptability – The capacity to remain flexible and realistic, solve problems, and adjust to change.
5. General Mood – An overall sense of well-being, optimism, and life satisfaction (Bar-On, 2014).

The composite scores are derived from a set of 15 subscales, creating a multidimensional profile of emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 2014). The Bar-On EQ-i framework adopts a comprehensive approach that emphasizes the interplay between cognitive and emotional components, offering a profound understanding of how individuals perceive, manage, and express their emotions. Unlike models that merely compile emotional skills, the Bar-On model integrates cognitive abilities—such as problem-solving and reality testing—with emotional competencies like empathy, emotional awareness, and impulse control (Bar-On, 2006). This thorough understanding underscores the value of the Bar-On EQ-i framework as a powerful tool for studying and applying emotional intelligence. This integration provides a broader framework for understanding how individuals navigate intrapersonal challenges (such as self-regulation and motivation) as well as interpersonal dynamics (including communication and collaboration). The EQ-i framework aligns with theoretical models that position emotional intelligence as a vital factor in personal development, academic success, and professional achievement (Bar-On, 2014; Burrus et al., 2022).

In academic settings, higher emotional intelligence (EI) has been linked to improved stress management, enhanced resilience, and increased classroom engagement (Moody et al., 2022). These factors contribute to improved student retention and perseverance (Bai, Nie, & Lee, 2022). In professional environments, individuals who score higher in EI typically demonstrate stronger leadership qualities, more effective teamwork, and greater job satisfaction (Doğru, 2023). The multidimensional structure of the Bar-On EQ-i is beneficial for evaluating the real-world effects of emotional intelligence across various life areas, highlighting its practical value and relevance (Doğru, 2023; Woldemichael & Shato, 2025).

This study highlights how the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) provides a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between various aspects of emotional intelligence and key student outcomes, including persistence, academic engagement, and retention (Bar-On, 2014). By evaluating a broad range of emotional and social competencies, the EQ-i enables researchers to assess not only overall emotional intelligence scores but also the specific contributions of each competency area. Furthermore, the EQ-i can identify crucial components, such as emotional self-regulation and optimism, providing insight into the psychological factors that influence a student's decision to remain enrolled and engaged. Importantly, this tool not only offers valuable diagnostic insights but also plays a crucial role in helping to develop effective strategies aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence, thus empowering educators and researchers (Bar-On, 2014; Iannucci & Mirabella, 2013).

4.0. Results

A summary of the demographic information about the participants in the study is found on

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

Demographic Group	N	% of Sample	Mean GPA	Retention Rate (%)
Female	165	82.5%	3.11	89%
Male	32	16.0%	3.08	85%
African American	177	88.5%	3.12	89%
Other Ethnicities	23	11.5%	3.06	85%
Age 18–24	169	84.5%	3.09	87%

Age 25+	31	15.5%	3.18	90%

Note: Grade Point Average (GPA). The retention rate reflects the percentage of students who are continuously enrolled from the previous academic term.

Table 1 offers a descriptive overview of the key demographic characteristics, academic performance (measured by GPA), and retention outcomes of the sample. The data highlight significant trends in gender, race/ethnicity, and age groups that merit further exploration regarding emotional intelligence and student success (Moody et al., 2022). The sample was predominantly composed of female students (82.5%), a distribution that aligns with enrollment patterns observed in many helping professions, such as social work and nursing. Female students reported a slightly higher mean GPA (3.11) compared to their male counterparts (3.08) and enjoyed a higher retention rate (89% versus 85%). While these differences are modest, they are consistent with existing literature, thereby lending credibility to our findings (Hen & Goroshit, 2014). Previous research suggests that female students often demonstrate higher emotional intelligence, particularly in the areas of empathy and interpersonal relationships, which may contribute to their enhanced academic performance, engagement, and persistence (Bai, Nie, & Lee, 2022; Moody et al., 2022).

The sample was predominantly African American, comprising 88.5% of participants, while students from other ethnic backgrounds made up only 11.5%. African American students exhibited a slightly higher mean GPA of 3.12 and a retention rate of 89% compared to their peers of different ethnicities, who had a GPA of 3.06 and a retention rate of 85%. This observation underscores the significant impact of institutional culture and specialized support services in predominantly Black institutions or programs, as well as the resilience factors and cultural strengths that contribute to academic success, providing valuable insights for educators and policymakers.

Most participants were traditional-aged college students, with 84.5% falling within the age range of 18 to 24 years, while 15.5% were aged 25 and older. Notably, older students reported a higher mean GPA of 3.18 and a retention rate of 90%, surpassing their younger counterparts, who had a GPA of 3.09 and a retention rate of 87%. These differences not only reflect the greater maturity, motivation, and life experience of nontraditional students but also highlight their enhanced emotional regulation and stress management skills—two key components of emotional intelligence that have been positively linked to persistence and academic performance. A correlation between EI subdomains and college GPA is found in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlations

EI Subdomain	Pearson r	Significance
Stress Management	0.31	p < .01
General Mood	0.28	p < .01
Adaptability	0.22	p < .05
Intrapersonal	0.11	ns
Interpersonal	0.08	ns

Note. Emotional Intelligence (EI), Grade Point Average (GPA) =. ns = not statistically significant.

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between five subdomains of Emotional Intelligence (EI), as measured by the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), and self-reported college GPA. The Bar-On EQ-i is a widely used self-report measure of emotional intelligence that assesses various aspects of EI, including general mood, adaptability, and interpersonal skills (Bar-On, 2014). The results indicated that not all aspects of EI equally predict academic performance, highlighting specific domains that may be more relevant to academic success. Stress Management ($r = .31$, $p < .01$): This subdomain emerged as the most crucial factor in academic success, showing a robust and statistically significant positive correlation with GPA. The ability to manage stress effectively, especially under the pressure of academic demands, is a key determinant of student success (Villanueva, 2017). This finding highlights the pressing need to address stress management in educational settings, aligning with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation and impulse control in helping students navigate academic challenges, meet deadlines, and manage anxiety during exams or high-stakes assignments (Villanueva, 2017; Ye et al., 2024).

General Mood (r = .28, p < .01): A positive general mood, encompassing optimism and life satisfaction, also showed a significant correlation with higher GPA. Students who maintain a positive outlook are more likely to be intrinsically motivated and resilient, which in turn enhances their concentration, class participation, and perseverance in challenging coursework (Moody et al., 2022). This finding underscores the significance of fostering a positive learning environment that supports students' emotional well-being and resilience (Han et al., 2022; Moody et al., 2022).

Adaptability (r = .22, p < .05): Adaptability, reflecting a student's ability to adjust to new situations and solve problems flexibly, showed a modest but statistically significant correlation with GPA. This suggests that emotionally intelligent students who can pivot in response to academic feedback or adjust their learning strategies are better positioned to succeed academically (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). The need for students to develop and enhance this skill is therefore crucial for their educational success (Martinez, & Ruiz, 2024; Uhl-Bien & Arena, (2018)).

Intrapersonal skills (r = .11, ns): The intrapersonal domain, which includes self-awareness and self-expression, showed a weak and non-significant relationship with GPA. While self-awareness may support personal growth, it does not directly influence academic outcomes unless paired with strong regulatory or problem-solving skills (Salih et al., 2024). Interpersonal (r = .08, ns): Similarly, interpersonal skills, such as empathy and social responsibility, did not significantly correlate with GPA. While these skills are crucial for collaboration and professional success, their weak correlation with GPA suggests that they may not have a direct impact on individual academic performance, particularly in coursework that emphasizes independent study. This finding highlights the importance of a balanced approach to emotional intelligence in educational settings, where both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills are valued, but not overemphasized in relation to academic achievement. Table 3 shows a regression model predicting GPA (Koydemir et al., 2013; Salih et al., 2024).

Table 3: Regression Model

Predictor	Beta	Significance
Stress Management	0.25	p < .01
General Mood	0.21	p < .01
High School GPA	0.18	p < .05

Note. Grade Point Average (GPA). Beta values represent standardized regression coefficients.

Table 3 presents the findings from a multiple linear regression analysis exploring the relationship between emotional intelligence subdomains, prior academic performance, and current college GPA. The model identifies three significant predictors: stress management, general mood, and high school GPA.

Stress Management (β = 0.25, p < .01): Stress management stands out as the strongest predictor in the model. This suggests that students who excel at regulating stress and managing emotional pressures are more likely to achieve higher GPAs in college. The finding highlights the holistic nature of academic achievement, indicating that success is not solely based on cognitive abilities but also emotional resilience and self-control (Nastasa et al., 2022). Since academic environments often demand multitasking, adherence to deadlines, and recovery from setbacks, effective stress management emerges as a crucial factor that helps students persist and perform well (Bai et al., 2022; Nastasa et al., 2022).

General Mood (β = 0.21, p < .01): General mood, encompassing feelings of optimism, happiness, and overall life satisfaction, also significantly predicts GPA. Students with a positive emotional outlook are typically more engaged, confident, and motivated—traits that are associated with better academic habits, such as setting goals, attending classes regularly, and maintaining sustained effort (Han et al., 2022). This finding is consistent with research suggesting that emotional well-being enhances cognitive functions, such as memory, attention, and problem-solving, all of which contribute to academic success (Collie, 2022; Guerra-Bustamante, et al., 2019).

High School GPA (β = 0.18, p < .05): As anticipated, high school GPA serves as a significant predictor of college GPA, although its influence is less pronounced compared to the emotional intelligence variables in this model. This suggests that while past academic performance provides a valuable baseline, emotional intelligence factors may have a more significant impact on success in the challenging and self-directed environment of higher education (Collie,

2022). Notably, the inclusion of emotional variables in the model enriches our understanding of GPA predictors beyond conventional academic measures.

Table 4 summarizes the results of a logistic regression analysis examining the impact of emotional intelligence subdomains and demographic factors on student retention.

Table 4: Logistic Regression Predicting Retention

Predictor	Odds Ratio	Significance
General Mood	1.07	p < .05
Stress Management	1.09	p < .05
Age	1.02	ns
Ethnicity	1.01	ns

Note: Odds Ratios represent the likelihood of student retention for each one-unit increase in the predictor variable, and 'ns' indicates not significant**.**

Table 4 presents the results of a comprehensive logistic regression analysis, providing an in-depth examination of the predictive power of various subdomains of emotional intelligence in conjunction with key demographic factors on student retention. These findings have practical implications for educators and policymakers, underscoring the crucial link between emotional competencies and sustained academic engagement as suggested by Moody et al. (2022). This information can inform strategies aimed at enhancing student retention. The outcome variable in this analysis is binary, categorized as retained versus not retained, and the model presents odds ratios (OR) to illustrate the likelihood of retention based on each predictor. General Mood (OR = 1.07, p < .05) has emerged as a statistically significant predictor of retention. Specifically, this indicates that for each one-unit increase in the general mood score—reflecting greater optimism, happiness, and life satisfaction—the odds of a student being retained increase by 7%. This finding implies that students with a more positive emotional outlook are more likely to remain committed to their academic programs, as they are better equipped to manage setbacks, maintain motivation, and pursue goal-oriented behaviors over time (Moody et al., 2022; Trigueros et al., 2019).

Additionally, Stress Management (OR = 1.09, p < .05) significantly predicts retention, with an odds ratio of 1.09. This suggests that for each one-unit increase in the ability to manage stress—encompassing emotional regulation and impulse control—the likelihood of retention rises by 9%. These findings are consistent with existing research that highlights stress management as a crucial protective factor in academic persistence (Turan & Rahman, 2024). Students who effectively navigate emotional and academic pressures are more likely to avoid burnout, address institutional challenges, and continue progressing towards degree completion. Conversely, Age (OR = 1.02, p = ns) and Ethnicity (OR = 1.01, p = ns) did not demonstrate statistical significance as predictors of retention in this model. While these demographic variables may interact with other psychosocial factors, their lack of independent influence on retention within this study sample suggests that emotional intelligence may serve as a more immediate and modifiable predictor than static demographic characteristics (Flanders, 2017; Turan & Rahman, 2024).

5.0. Discussion

The study findings suggest that emotional intelligence (EI) is a multidimensional construct, with certain domains—particularly stress management and general mood—strongly linked to academic performance. This highlights the need for targeted interventions in higher education that focus on developing students' resilience, emotional regulation, and positive mindset, rather than just enhancing emotional intelligence in general. Institutions should consider integrating emotional wellness programs, mindfulness training, or cognitive-behavioral strategies into their student support services to improve academic outcomes. The regression model demonstrates the additional predictive value of emotional intelligence, especially stress management and general mood, beyond prior educational achievement. This supports the idea of incorporating social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health interventions into college student support programs (Collie, 2022). By enhancing students' ability to manage stress and maintain a positive emotional state, these interventions may improve academic outcomes, persistence, and

retention, particularly for diverse or under-resourced student populations (Iannucci & Mirabella, 2013; Nastasa et al., 2022).

The findings highlight the significance of emotional well-being and stress management in promoting sustained engagement in higher education (Moody et al., 2022). The significant impact of general mood and stress management suggests that interventions aimed at improving emotional intelligence—such as resilience training, peer support groups, mindfulness workshops, or cognitive-behavioral techniques—could enhance retention rates, especially among students at risk of dropping out. Moreover, the limited predictive power of demographic factors, such as age and ethnicity, indicates that emotional intelligence skills are relevant across diverse student groups, reinforcing the value of EI-focused programming as an inclusive and equitable approach to student success (Moody et al., 2022; Salih et al., 2024).

The results align with existing literature, which shows that emotional intelligence, particularly in the areas of stress management and overall mood, correlates strongly with academic success and retention (Turan & Rahman, 2024). These domains may help students cope with academic pressures, stay motivated, and remain enrolled in their studies. Intrapersonal and interpersonal EI scores did not show a strong correlation with GPA, suggesting that emotion regulation might be more critical for academic persistence than emotional awareness alone. Demographic trends indicate that female students and those pursuing careers in helping professions may exhibit higher emotional intelligence, which could serve as a protective factor in high-stress academic environments. The retention findings highlight the potential role of emotional intelligence in student persistence, suggesting that targeted training in EI could enhance both educational outcomes and institutional retention rates (Villanueva, 2017; Turan & Rahman, 2024).

6.0. Limitations

This study presents several methodological limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, all key variables, including GPA, emotional intelligence (EI), and retention status, were obtained through self-report measures. These measures are inherently vulnerable to response biases, such as social desirability, recall inaccuracies, or intentional misreporting. Although self-reported GPA has been shown to have acceptable validity in prior research, it may still differ from official academic records, especially among students experiencing academic stress or grade-related anxiety. Similarly, self-assessment tools like the Bar-On EQ-i, while well-validated, are subjective and may be influenced by an individual's self-perception or mood at the time of completion (Bar-On, 2014). While the use of self-report measures introduces potential biases, it is essential to note that such tools are standard practice in emotional intelligence research and have been extensively validated. The Bar-On EQ-i, in particular, is one of the most psychometrically robust instruments available, offering high reliability and predictive validity across diverse populations (Bar-On, 2014). Moreover, prior research supports the use of self-reported data, including GPA, as a reasonably accurate proxy for official records in large-scale educational studies, especially when data are collected anonymously to minimize social desirability bias (Bar-On, 2014; Joseph et al., 2015).

Secondly, the study employed a convenience sampling strategy, recruiting participants who were readily accessible to the researchers (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Although this approach is often used in exploratory research due to its practicality and efficiency, it introduces potential sampling bias and significantly limits the generalizability of the findings (Lawson et al., 2019). The sample may not accurately reflect the broader population of college students in terms of academic background, institutional context, cultural diversity, or support needs. Therefore, caution is warranted when extrapolating these results to other educational settings or student populations. While this approach limits generalizability, it is also a pragmatic choice for exploratory studies that aim to generate hypotheses and identify patterns within specific populations (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). The large sample size (N = 200) and demographic diversity—particularly the high representation of African American and nontraditional students—enhance the internal validity and contextual relevance of the findings (Batchelor, 2019). These insights are particularly valuable for minority-serving institutions and can inform targeted interventions that address the needs of historically underserved student groups (Batchelor, 2019; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Additionally, the study's cross-sectional design restricts its ability to draw causal inferences. While significant correlations and predictive relationships were identified, it is impossible to determine the directionality of these effects (Batchelor, 2019). According to Tabachnick & Fidell (2019), cross-sectional studies, which are typically characterized by the simultaneous assessment of both exposure and outcome variables, are often considered to have limited usefulness in drawing causal inferences. This design captures a snapshot in time, offering valuable insights

into associations but falling short of establishing the directional relationships between factors. As a result, while they can illuminate correlations, they may not provide definitive evidence of cause and effect (Lawson et al., 2019). For example, while higher emotional intelligence may contribute to academic success and retention, it is equally possible that students who succeed academically develop greater confidence and emotional regulation over time. Longitudinal studies would be better suited to assess the temporal dynamics and causal mechanisms underlying these relationships (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Although the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, the statistically significant correlations between EI subdomains (e.g., stress management and general mood) and academic outcomes provide a compelling foundation for future longitudinal research. Cross-sectional data remain valuable for identifying relationships and informing theoretical models, particularly in emerging areas such as emotional intelligence and college retention. Moreover, the strength of the findings across multiple regression analyses suggests a meaningful, if not causal, association worthy of continued investigation through mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches (Batchelor, 2019; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

7.0. Implications

The results of this study highlight several vital implications for practices in higher education, policy development, and student support programming. Specifically, the findings highlight the crucial role of emotional intelligence, particularly in stress management and overall mood, in improving academic performance and student retention. These insights can inform the development of evidence-based, emotionally responsive strategies on campus that aim to enhance student outcomes, particularly for diverse and nontraditional student populations (Martinez & Ruiz, 2024). Given the statistically significant impact of stress management and general mood on both GPA and retention rates, colleges and universities should consider integrating emotional intelligence skill-building into their academic support and wellness programs as suggested by O'Connell et al. (2022). This could include mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) workshops, which have been shown to reduce anxiety, improve focus, and enhance emotional regulation among college students (Li et al., 2022). Such workshops can teach students techniques in mindfulness meditation, body scanning, and breathing exercises, helping them respond to academic stress with greater clarity and composure. By embedding MBSR programs into wellness centers or offering them as co-curricular activities, institutions can equip students with the lifelong skills necessary for managing stress and enhancing emotional awareness (Li et al., 2022; Martinez & Ruiz, 2024).

Additionally, resilience training modules should be introduced in first-year experience courses to support students during this vulnerable transition period in higher education (Trigueros et al., 2019). These modules may include strategies for adaptive thinking, goal-setting, managing setbacks, and developing grit and perseverance. By incorporating resilience education into required first-year experience courses, institutions can ensure broad accessibility and foster a culture of emotional competence and self-efficacy from the outset of students' academic journeys (Hilton et al., 2022). Peer coaching or mentoring programs that focus on emotional self-regulation and positive reframing can also be particularly effective. Students trained in peer support roles can assist their peers in identifying emotional triggers, challenging negative thought patterns, and modeling constructive coping behaviors (Rennick & Kim, 2023). These programs benefit not only the recipients but also enhance the leadership and emotional intelligence skills of the peer mentors themselves, promoting a community of mutual support (Hilton et al., 2022; Rennick & Kim, 2023).

Moreover, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) should be integrated into academic success centers or counseling services, allowing students to receive targeted interventions for issues such as test anxiety, procrastination, and self-defeating thoughts (Turan & Rahman, 2024). Workshops and individual coaching sessions can apply CBT principles to teach students how to recognize and reframe cognitive distortions, develop healthy study habits, and build emotional resilience (Bai et al., 2022). These interventions are particularly impactful for students at risk of academic failure or dropout, as they enhance students' ability to cope with academic pressures, maintain a hopeful outlook, and stay goal-oriented during challenging times. When coordinated across departments, such as student affairs, academic advising, and counseling, these efforts can create a seamless and supportive ecosystem that empowers all students to thrive (O'Connell et al., 2022; Turan & Rahman, 2024).

Furthermore, the findings suggest that higher education institutions should adopt formal social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks, similar to those used in K–12 education, that promote emotional competence as part of the academic curriculum (Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning, 2020). Institutions can mandate SEL-infused learning objectives in general education or capstone courses and incorporate emotional intelligence assessments, such as the EQ-i, during orientation or early advising sessions to identify students who may benefit

from emotional development interventions. Institutions should frame emotional intelligence as a necessary component of student success, particularly for historically marginalized groups who may face additional emotional labor and environmental stressors (Rennick & Kim, 2023). By doing so, they affirm the value of holistic student development, where academic success is supported not only by intellectual ability but also by emotional resilience and well-being (Boin & Lodge, 2016; Rennick & Kim, 2023).

The study's demographic findings, particularly the higher GPAs and retention rates among African American students and female students, highlight the strengths these populations bring, which may be linked to greater emotional intelligence or culturally developed coping strategies. Institutions should leverage these insights by creating culturally responsive emotional intelligence programs that validate and strengthen community-based emotional competencies (Boin & Lodge, 2016). Additionally, they can tailor interventions for male students or students in non-helping majors, who may benefit from enhanced training in empathy, interpersonal communication, or stress regulation. It is crucial to ensure demographic inclusivity in emotional intelligence initiatives, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach and recognizing the intersectional needs across various demographics, including race, age, gender, and academic discipline (Martinez & Ruiz, 2024). Overall, the strong predictive power of emotional intelligence compared to traditional academic metrics suggests that it should be prioritized in higher education settings and program evaluation.

8.0. Conclusion

In sum, this study's findings reinforce that emotional intelligence, particularly in the domains of stress management and general mood, is not merely an individual psychological trait but a strategic asset in promoting educational equity, improving student retention, and enhancing academic performance (Trigueros et al., 2019). The ability to manage stress and maintain a positive emotional outlook equips students with essential tools to navigate the increasingly complex social and academic pressures of higher education. These emotional competencies foster resilience, increase help-seeking behavior, and support the development of strong interpersonal connections, all of which are critical for long-term academic and personal success (Akkaraju et al., 2019). The implications of these findings extend beyond individual development and call for a coordinated, systemic approach to embedding emotional intelligence into the fabric of higher education. Practitioners, including academic advisors, faculty, and mental health professionals, must be equipped to recognize and nurture students' emotional skills as part of a holistic support model. Policymakers should advocate for the inclusion of emotional intelligence training and assessment in institutional metrics of student success, recognizing its potential to close achievement gaps and support historically underserved populations (Akkaraju et al., 2019; O'Connell et al., 2022).

At the institutional level, leaders must take deliberate steps to integrate emotional development into curricular and co-curricular programming (Luna et al., 2019). This includes embedding social and emotional learning (SEL) objectives in general education requirements, establishing dedicated spaces for emotional wellness, and investing in professional development for staff on trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices (Presbitero, 2016). When emotional intelligence is viewed not as supplemental but as central to academic readiness and persistence, institutions can cultivate more effective learning environments that are inclusive, resilient, and empowering for all students (Luna et al., 2019; Rennick & Kim, 2023).

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