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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR EMPOWERING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' WELL-BEING: A SYNTHESIS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

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#### Abstract

Recently, there is an urgent call to focus on the holistic development of students, including their mental health, in order to decrease the rate of dropouts and improve students' academic performance. For this reason and others, there is an increasing interest in promoting students' well-being in higher education due to its positive impact on students' motivation and engagement. To achieve this, emotional intelligence appears to help students regulate their emotions effectively to face challenging issues that threaten their mental well-being. Taking this into account, this paper aims to analyze the relationship between developing emotional intelligence and students' well-being, and to suggest effective strategies to enhance students' emotional intelligence at university settings. To meet this aim, the study adopted a systematic review of literature that used quantitative and qualitative data analysis to come up with a synthesis of theory and practice. 15 peer-reviewed articles were reviewed to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and university students' well-being. The findings revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between developing emotional intelligence and university students' well-being, and that a set of psychosocial and socio-educational factors mediate this relationship. Eventually, universities need to put more efforts into developing students' emotional intelligence skills that improve their academic and professional achievement, which empower their mental health. The current study contributes to expanding literature by providing a synthesis of theory and practice on emotional intelligence and students' well-being. Additionally, it will have implications for the integration of emotional intelligence development in Moroccan higher education.

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#### Introduction:-

Students' psychological well-being and their abilities to cope with adverse circumstances highly affect their successful adaptation to university life. University studies make students experience high levels of anxiety and stress as their responsibilities get bigger. Students at the tertiary level are required to exhibit a high sense of autonomy and self-efficacy through the development of necessary skills. Besides, they face a number of challenges related to their social life, that affect negatively their mental well-being; university students are supposed to maintain healthy relationships with their professors and classmates free of conflicts and crises. That is why, students should be

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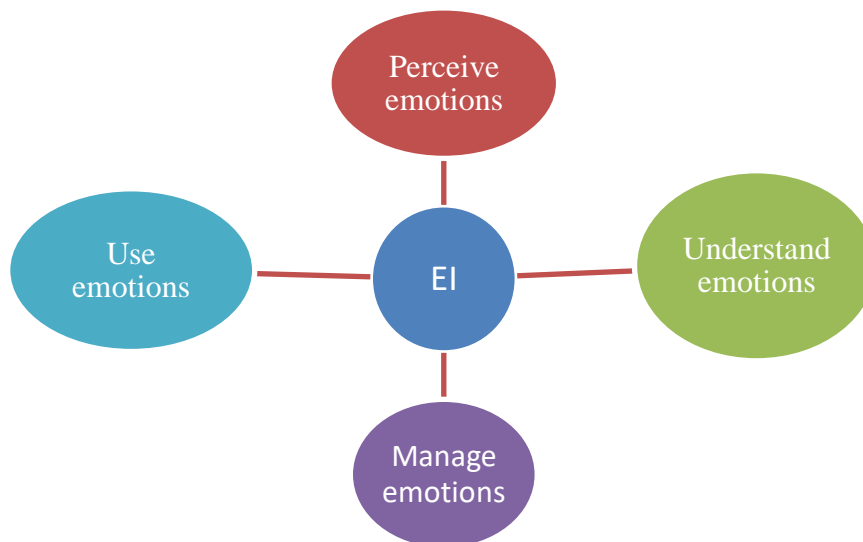
equipped with adequate social and communicative skills that enable them to avoid emotional distress and enjoy stronger personal relationships.

To achieve this, universities are not only expected to develop students' academic skills, but also to contribute to their personal development. Thus, strengthening emotional intelligence (EI) skills among university students appears to be a promising option to struggle against the wide range of emotional hardships that students go through and to help them achieve academic and professional success. In the same respect, the current study strives to analyze the role of developing emotional intelligence in empowering university students' well-being through a systematic review of recent studies and to suggest recommendations on the most effective ways to develop students' emotional intelligence in university settings.

### Emotional intelligence

With the recent interest in positive psychology and its role in promoting students' mental health, the latest researches focused on studying emotional intelligence and students' well-being. The concept of Emotional intelligence (EI), dates back to Darwin's publication in 1872 which highlighted the necessity of "emotional expression" for viability and adaptability (Bar-on,2012). Then, Thorndike's theory "social intelligence" (1920) , defined as "the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls—to act wisely in human relations" that shed light on intelligence as an ability to behave effectively in different socio-cultural contexts. Later, the definition of intelligence was broadened in Howard Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences (1983) but it extended "social intelligence" into "interpersonal intelligence" (the competence to understand and interact efficiently with others by being sensitive to their intentions, moods, motivations and temperaments) and "intrapersonal intelligence" (the ability to understand oneself to be able to refine, analyze and regulate one's emotional life) (Marenus,2024).

The early definitions of social intelligence inspired greatly the term emotional intelligence; when Salovey and Mayer (1990) first used it, it was perceived as "a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's own thinking and action". In 1997, the same researchers developed this ability into a four-branch model. This latter, described emotional intelligence into four areas of mental capacities that backed up the results of psychological studies and confirmed the implication of cognitive processing in understanding and monitoring emotions (Fiori and Vesely-maillefer,2018). The four abilities comprised perceiving, using, managing and understanding emotions (figure 1.). The model initiated the development of other models and frameworks, moreover, it raised the attention of educators to the subskills needed to enhance students' emotional intelligence.



**Figure1:-** Mayer & Salovey four-branch model (1997).

The concept of emotional intelligence was popularized after the publication of Daniel Goleman's best seller "emotional intelligence" in (1995). This latter, proposed a framework that focuses on how EI skills: "self-

awareness, self-management, social awareness, and the ability to manage relationships”, lead to person’s personal and professional success (Goleman ,1995). According to Goleman, emotional intelligence can make people take better decisions not only to solve personal problems but also to address ongoing challenges in the world. He believes emotional intelligence enables students to plan well their studies, deal with new environments and fight against negative emotions.

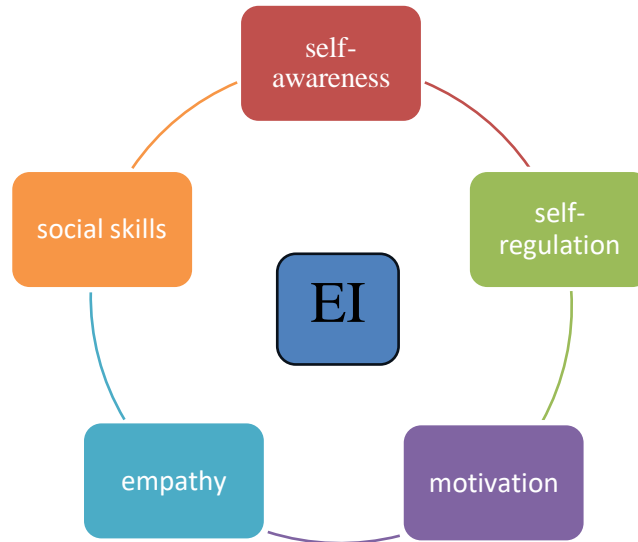


Figure 2:-The components of emotional intelligence (Goleman,1995)

Reuven Bar-on (1996) suggested another conceptual model for emotional intelligence referred to as “emotional-social intelligence”, and that encompasses many of the skills and competencies presented in other models. Bar-on defined the construct as a set of interrelated socio-emotional skills, competencies and behaviors that determine how we can effectively understand ourselves and others and relate with them. Also, how to face daily pressures (Bar-on, 2012).

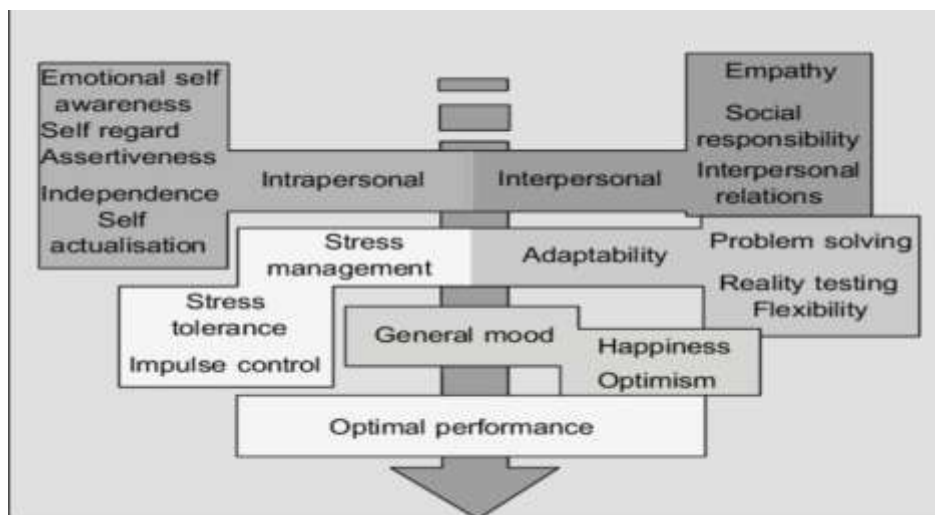


Figure 3:- Bar-on model dimensions and subscales (1996).

In brief, the encyclopedia of applied psychology (2004) concluded that there are three conceptual frameworks of emotional intelligence: “The ability model” (Salovey and Mayer ,1990), “the trait model” (Goleman and Petrides,1995) and “the mixed model” (Bar-on ,1997).All of the above-mentioned models,agreed that emotional intelligence comprises personal and social abilities and skills that help the person to understand oneself and others

and to interact effectively with the environment in order to avoid distress and discomfort and to confront life hardships and to realize personal and professional welfare.

### **Students' psychological well-being**

Recently, the science of positive psychology has come under scrutiny to ensure positive human functioning in different fields and domains. Positive psychology is about valued subjective experiences and traits that promise to optimize life quality and hold back all the negative emotions that arise in difficult times. Positive psychology highlights individual traits and attributes such as “the capacity for love, courage, interpersonal skills, aesthetic sensibility, future mindedness, high talent and others” (Seligman et Csikszentimahlyi, 2000). For this reason and others, the relationship between positive psychology and subjective well-being has gained interest among psychologists, educators and researchers.

To understand subjective well-being, literature provides theoretical guidance from developmental psychology, clinical psychology and mental health (Ryff,1995) but generally it has been discussed from two perspectives: the hedonic and the eudaimonic (Ryan and Deci ,2001). The former stresses how the individual can engage in positive experiences that bring about personal satisfaction and pleasure. While the eudaimonic perspective focuses on individuals' personal development to reach full potential that allows the person to enjoy a long-term positive state of self-satisfaction. In the same vein,Ryff (1995) stated that “human eudaimonic well-being involves six personal resources: self-acceptance, positive relationships with other people, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth”. Hence, it is all about the individual's commitment to face life challenges and to engage in a lifelong process of self-reflection to reach self-realization and subjective well-being (Salavera et al, 2020).

Students' experience one of the hardest stressful periods during their university studies. They endure physical, psychological and emotional changes that affect their mental health and influence their academic performance. University students are expected to demonstrate high levels of autonomy, self-regulation, responsibility and diligence. Furthermore, they go through negative feelings of academic stress, anxiety, fear of failure and distress, in addition to socio-economic problems that complicate their successful adjustment to a new learning context. As a result, students may lack motivation and enthusiasm or even drop out and do not continue their higher studies, which reduces their chances of getting satisfying jobs and decreases their levels of psychological well-being.

To find out more about university students' mental health, Stallman (2010) conducted a study in two large Australian universities on 6,479 participants, the results showed that there is a prevalence of mental health problems reporting subsyndromal symptoms. To add to this, psychological distress was related to disability and lower academic achievement. Likewise, Lipson and Eisenberg (2019)revealed that “there is a variety of psychosocial stressors that students encounter during their college and university years” and these problems were a significant predictor of academic dissatisfaction and drop out intentions. Similarly, Sandoval et al. (2017) found out a high portion of university students exhibiting a medium degree of psychological well-being.In the US, Beiter et al. (2015) reported that “the top three concerns of university students were academic performance, pressure to succeed, and post-graduation plans”. Besides, they found out that “the most stressed students were transfers, upperclassmen, and those living off-campus”.

In Morocco, Covid-19 pandemic triggered researchers' interest in the investigation of university students' mental health. A study run by Jaouad et al. (2019) asserted that Moroccan university students experience daily pressures that affect them emotionally and push them to exhibit disproportionate reactions to the situations they encounter. In the same vein, Chelieh et al. (2022) investigated medical students' well-being in Morocco and raised attention to their poor mental health, as they found out very high rates of burn out among them, also they reported high levels of exhaustion and disengagement. Obviously, university students' mental health and well-being need a special care from policy makers, educators and curriculum developers to start thinking of integrating health care measures effectively into students' life. Hence, the role of educational institutions is to prepare a positive environment that “promotes motivation, engagement, participation, citizenship, and social-emotional well-being, because when the conditions for holistic development are optimized, so are learning and educational outcomes” (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

### **Method:-**

The study at hand has adopted a mixed research approach that utilizes a systematic review of the literature on developing emotional intelligence and university students' well-being, following a clear and scientific research procedure with inclusion and exclusion criteria so as to suggest the most effective strategies and methods to develop

university students' emotional intelligence skills. The study has followed the PRISMA statement (2020) to report the systematic review.

### Search strategy

The data was gathered from four selected international databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Springer and Google Scholar. The researcher applied the search in the field of title, abstract /or keywords by entering two main keywords: "emotional intelligence" AND "students' well-being" and specifying the field of education. The search for relevant studies was undergone between March and May 2024, and resulted into an identification of 54 records.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

As declared in PRISMA guidelines, it is essential to establish "inclusion" and "exclusion" criteria to ensure that the selected literature is consistent with the main objectives of the study and can achieve the research purpose. Against this backdrop, the study established a set of criteria outlined in the table below (table 1.), to come up with a relevant selection of literature that can better analyze the relationship between emotional intelligence and university students' well-being.

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Publication period	Published (2020 - May 2024)	Published before 2020
Type of document	Scientific peer-reviewed articles	Not a scientific article
Type of study	Theoretical and empirical	Reviews, opinions, letters, proceedings.
Language	English	Neither in English
Targeted population	University students	Other education levels (secondary,high-school, primary)

**Table 1:-** Criteria of selected studies.

### Research quality analysis

After applying "inclusion" and "exclusion" criteria, a set of 15 articles were selected for a research quality analysis based on The Johanna Briggs Checklist (JBI) (2020). This latter, is used to evaluate research methodology by asking a number of questions related to research approach and design, sampling strategy, data collection and analysis, and so on. To ensure reviewing high-quality papers, the articles selected met the following standards (JBI, 2020):

- Is the research purpose stated clearly?
- Does it investigate emotional intelligence and university students' well-being?
- Are data instruments used appropriate?
- Are the findings beneficial to the research community?
- Are the conclusions supported by the data analyzed?
- Does it include recommendations for future research?
- Does it provide implications for future practice?

Furthermore, the research protocols of 11 studies selected had already the approval of different ethics committees as shown in the table below (table 2.) while the other 4 studies, described clearly the research procedures and declared to respect ethical issues related to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and data privacy.As a result, no study was excluded based on quality assessment, (N=15) articles were selected for a quantitative and qualitative synthesis.

Selected studies	Ethics committees
I.Morales Rodriguez et al. "The Relationship between Psychological Well-Being and Psychosocial Factors in University Students."	Ethics Committee of the University of Granada (Granada, Spain) approved the study protocol under the registration number: 328/CEIH/2017.

2.Wang et al. “The Relationship among College Students’ Physical Exercise, Self-Efficacy, Emotional Intelligence, and Subjective Well-Being.”	Ethics Committee of School of Physical Education in Southwest University (SWU-TY202105) approved and followed the Declaration of Helsinki.
3.Trigueros et al. “The Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Resilience, Test Anxiety, Academic Stress and the Mediterranean Diet. A Study with University Students.”	The bioethics committee of the University of Almeria (Ref. UALBIO 2019/014) approved the study and declared that all the procedures were established following the Declaration of Helsinki.
4.Jafari et al. “Relationship of Spiritual well-being and emotional intelligence among Iranian' nursing students.”	Proposed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Bam University of Medical Sciences.
5. Extremera et al. “Pathways between Ability Emotional Intelligence and Subjective Well-Being: Bridging Links through Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies”.	Research Ethics Committee of the University of Malaga (Spain) approved the protocol study as part of the project PSI2012-38813 following the Declaration of Helsinki
6.Barros & Sacau-Fontenla “New Insights on the Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence and Social Support on University Students’ Mental Health during COVID-19 Pandemic: Gender Matters.”	The University of Fernando Pessoa (Porto, Portugal, Ref. PI-138/21) approved the study and declared that it respects all procedures of the Declaration of Helsinki.
7.Shoeps et al. “Impact of emotional development intervention program on subjective well-being of university students.”	Data collection procedures followed the standards of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), with permission from the Ethics Commission of the University of Valencia (H1385330676977).
8.Moeller et al. “Emotional Intelligence, Belongingness, and Mental Health in College Students.”	Middlebury Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved all study procedures.
9.Fteiha and Awwad “Emotional intelligence and its relationship with stress coping style.”	Approved by the Institutional Review Board.
10.Licata et al. “Building a healthy lifestyle: the role of emotional intelligence among Italian university students.”	Approved by the Local Human Research Ethic Committee and was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration.
11. Ain et al. “Role of emotional and grit in life satisfaction.”	Data collection was approved by the Forman Christian College University Institutional Review Board (IRB), IRB-108/122018.

**Table 2:-**The Description of approved selected studies.

### Selection of studies

The initial records identified in the four international databases were (N=54), but after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria N=39 studies were excluded. The number of the selected studies that meet the already-set criteria, is N=15. Conversely, no study was excluded after the methodological quality assessment. They all respected the scientific research procedures and most of them were approved by ethics committees. The selection process is better described in the following “PRISMA” flow diagram (2020), while the characteristics of studies selected for review are presented in table 3.

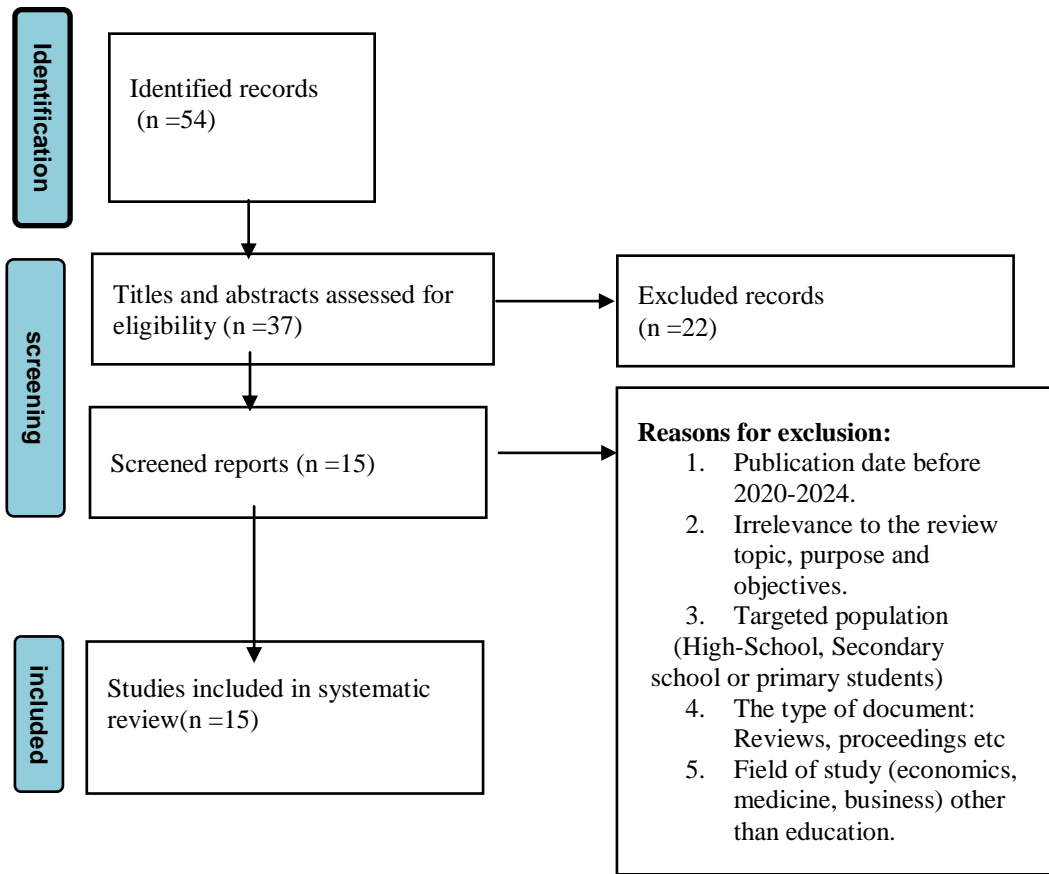


Figure 4:- PRISMA flow diagram describing the selection process of studies reviewed.

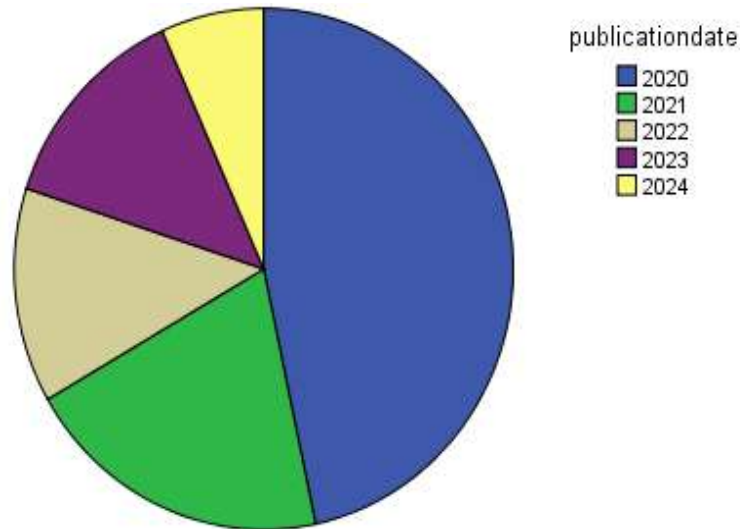
Author(s)	Publication date	Country	Researchmethod	Research design
Elegbeleye et al.	2020	Nigeria	Quantitative	Cross-sectional survey
Morales-Rodríguez et al.	2020	Spain	Quantitative	Cross-sectional design
Wang et al.	2022	China	Quantitative	Correlational
Extremera et al.	2020	Spain	Quantitative	Cross-sectional
Schoeps et al.	2020	Spain	Quantitative	Quasi-experimental
Moeller et al.	2020	United States of America	Quantitative	Longitudinal
Shuo et al.	2022	China	Quantitative	Correlational design
Chen and kim	2024	China	Quantitative	Quasi-experimental
Trigueros et al.	2020	Spain	Quantitative	Correlational
Ain et al.	2021	Pakistan	Quantitative	Correlational
Jafari et al.	2021	Iran	Quantitative	Descriptive-analytic
Barros and Sacau-Fontenla	2021	Portugal	Quantitative	Correlational
Kritika et Lone	2023	India	Quantitative	Correlational
Fteiha and Awwad	2020	United Arab Emirates	Quantitative	Cross sectional
Licata et al.	2023	Italy	Quantitative	Cross-sectional

Table 3:- Characteristics of the selected studies.



### Result and Discussion:-

The total of 15 scientific studies were systematically reviewed to investigate the relationship between developing emotional intelligence and university students' well-being, and to identify the most effective strategies and interventions to develop their emotional intelligence, in order to overcome the psychological barriers that affect their mental health and influence their academic and professional achievement. The distribution of the publication year of the studies selected revealed that most of them (n=10) were published between 2020 (46.7%) and 2021 (20%) as represented in the figure below:

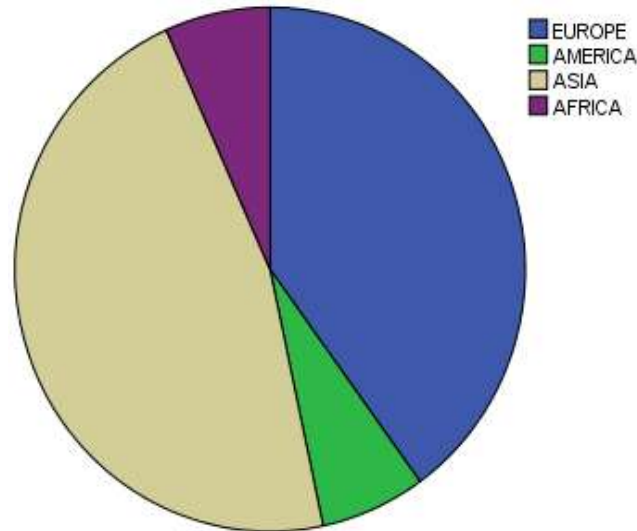


**Figure 5:-** The distribution of publication year of the selected studies.

This finding is aligned with the great interest allotted to students' well-being during the COVID19 pandemic, as many researchers were concerned by examining students' mental health, especially after the closure of schools and universities worldwide, the long periods of lockdown, the social distancing measures and other negative emotional experiences that students suffered from during this period (Barros & Sacau-Fontenla, 2021; Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2021; Goodlet et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the observation of the distribution of the place of publication demonstrated that most of the studies reviewed were published in Asia (46.7%), n=7 (China, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Pakistan and India) and in Europe (40%) n=6 (Spain, Italy and Portugal), while one was published in United States of America and another one in the African continent exactly in Nigeria. However, no study was found in Australia or in the oceanic continent.





**Figure 6:-** Distribution of place of publication by continent.

As far as the research methodology adopted to conduct these studies, all of the researchers followed a quantitative research method using different research instruments: tests, questionnaires and scales that utilized either self-report measures (Moeller et al., 2020; Barros et Sacau-fontenla ,2021; Jafari et al., 2021; Ain et al. ,2021; Trigueros et al., 2020; Morales-Rodriguez, 2020; Elegbeleye et al., 2020) or performance-based measures (Extremera et al. 2020; Chen et Kim, 2024; Schoeps et al. ,2020) , which go along with the principles of the three principal models of emotional intelligence :”The ability model”(1990), “the trait model”(1995) and “the mixed model”(1997).

Accordingly, research designs followed in these studies range between cross-sectional, correlational, longitudinal and quasi-experimental designs as already listed in (table 4). In terms of data analysis, many of the studies (Wang et al., 2022; Ain et al., 2021; Shuo et al., 2022) used statistical data analysis in the form of correlational analysis that measure the degree or association between independent and dependent variables to explain the relationship between emotional intelligence and students’ well-being and its mediating factors. Other researches, used structural equation models that incorporate causal paths to identify the strength of multiple mediating variables (Trigueros et al,2020; Chen et Kim ,2024).

Although the use of quantitative research methods has a number of advantages since “it enables to test the theories deductively, build in protections against bias, control for alternative explanations and allows the generalization and replication of findings” (Creswell & Creswell,2018), there is a noticeable scarcity of qualitative and mixed approach methods use to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and students’ well-being. These research approaches can provide studies with corroboration and in depth, particularly if we are trying to understand and analyze individual traits and experiences. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods can offer a wholistic perspective to research and balance out the limitations reported in several studies (Jafari et al.,2021; Shuo et al,2022; Wang et al.,2022).

The targeted population in all the selected studies is undergraduate university students whereas only one study addressed postgraduate students (Shuo et al ,2022).Study samples comprised participants from different fields of studies: Medicine, Arts, Humanities, Business, Science, Engineering, Sport and Law. In these studies , it is advisable that the more departments are included in the study ,the more we can exclude bias issues and focus on the development of all students at the tertiary level because the conditions of emotional intelligence and stress might be discrepant from one field to another as stated by Fteiha et Awwad (2020).Furthermore, it is crucial to take into account that the syllabus of some disciplines such as medicine for example , may include psychological care modules that tackle the issue and affect the reliability and validity of the research results (Jafari et al , 2021).

Most of the studies’ findings demonstrated that there is a strong correlation between university students’ psychological well-being and emotional intelligence except one study conducted by Prasad et Lone (2023) on a sample size of 103 undergraduate students in India, which concluded that there is no significant correlation between

the two. A number of factors such as social support, social skills, intra- and inter- personal constructs, cognitive emotion regulation strategies, gender, age and others, mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and university students’ well-being.

The majority of selected studies found that high rates of emotional intelligence were related to high degrees of psychological well-being. Factors like perceived social support seem to enhance college students’ psychological well-being and at the same time relate to levels of emotional intelligence; students with lower EI rates need higher portions of social support (Licata et al., 2020; Elgebeleye et al., 2020; Barros et Sacau-Fontenla,2021; Ain et al., 2021; Shuo et al. ,2022; Chen et kim,2024). These results are consistent with Moeller et al. (2020) findings which confirmed that “students with more EQ experienced higher levels of belongingness (more inclusion) which, in turn, was associated with lower mental health problems”, while students with lower levels of EQ seem to experience rejection. Eventually, these students feel higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Hence, social support mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and university students’ well-being.

Emotional intelligence also influences college students’ resilience as students who exhibited high EQ levels had high levels of “resilience” (Trigueros et al. ,2020; Shuo et al., 2022). Extremera et al. (2020) provided preliminary evidence that the relationship between emotional intelligence and university students’ well-being is mediated by students’ use of cognitive emotional regulation strategies. It was found that “higher EI ability was associated with higher use of adaptive cognitive emotional strategies (focusing planning, lower catastrophizing, high rumination, positive reappraisal) and lower use of maladaptive coping strategies (catastrophizing, self-blame)”. These results are consistent with the proposed study of Fteiha and Awwad (2020) on emotional intelligence and stress coping skills. Consequently, students’ ability to adapt to the multiple contingencies they face during their college life is detrimental in lowering their anxiety, stress and pressures and thus optimizing their psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

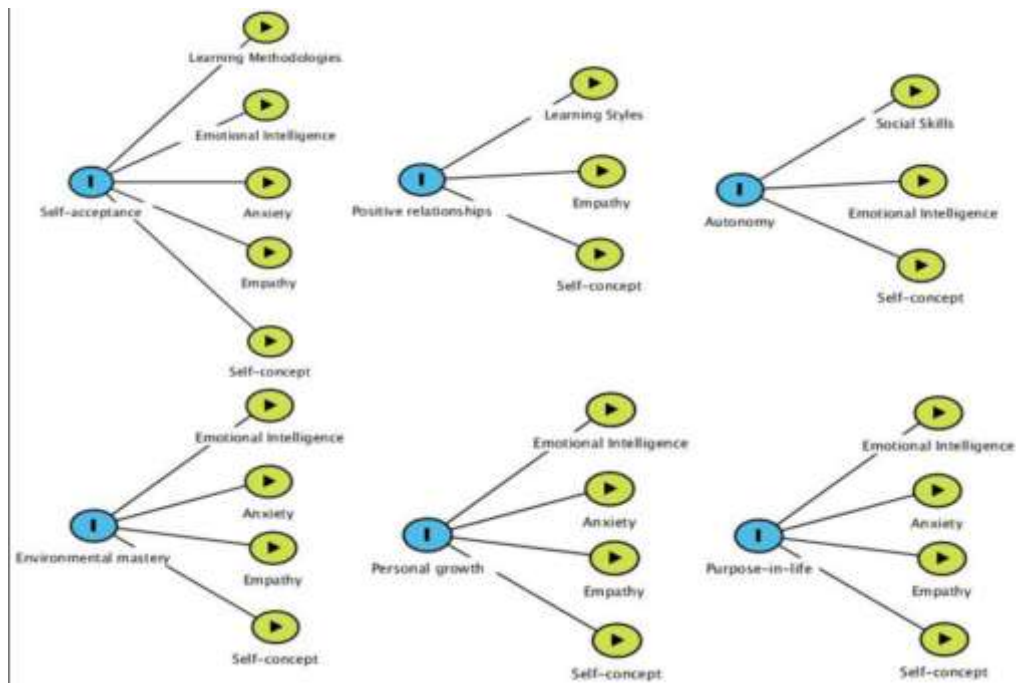


Figure 7:- Psychological well-being and psychosocial factors (Morales et al.,2020).

Eventually, empowering university students’ psychological well-being necessitate taking into consideration various psychosocial factors (social skills, anxiety, empathy, self-concept, autonomy) that are related to emotional intelligence development as clearly explained in the graph above.

There are controversial opinions about the effect of gender differences on emotional intelligence and university students’ well-being, as many studies highlighted this issue (Elegbeleye et al., 2020; Ain et al., 2021; Jafari et al.,

2021; Barros et al., 2021). In some studies, females reported higher levels of emotional intelligence than males (Elegbeleye et al., 2020), whereas in others males seemed to have higher levels of emotional intelligence than females (Jafari et al., 2021; Ain et al., 2021; Barros et al., 2021). Initially, Bar-on (2006) has already stated that gender differences exist in emotional intelligence ability, by both females and males showing strengths and weaknesses. This may be due to cultural, geographical and contextual factors (Elegbeleye et al., 2020). Nonetheless, these differences had no significant impact on the relationship between emotional intelligence and students' well-being.

Regarding educational practices, studies came up with a wide range of practical recommendations that can develop university students' emotional intelligence and improve their eudaimonic well-being. At first, there is a necessity for university professors, educators, students, parents, university administrators, counsellors and curriculum developers to be fully aware of the necessity of developing students' emotional intelligence and its impact on their mental health, eventually on their academic and professional achievement (Fteiha et Awwad, 2020). The findings urged the need to design initiatives for students as preventive procedures to deal with stress, anxiety and pressure that they go through during their college studies.

This fact, can be achieved by offering students counselling and support services that help them to develop cognitive emotion regulation strategies (Morales-Rodriguez et al., 2020). Furthermore, universities should think of introducing courses and activities that target the promotion of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, competence, optimism, self-concept, autonomy and resilience into educational programs so as to enhance their adaptability to face various emotional challenges (Trigueros et al., 2020). Respectively, the incorporation of growth programs such as dispositional mindfulness (Kong et al., 2014) also, the stress on skill development programs, competence enhancement approaches, interactive teaching methods, well-defined learning goals, and emotional skill training relate positively to life satisfaction and emotional intelligence and can benefit students to grow emotionally and socially intelligent (Schoeps et al., 2020; Ain et al., 2021).

The development of emotional intelligence skills should be based on organizing workshops or talks, intervention programs, career counselling workshopsto equip students with the necessary coping strategies that can be used to solve conflictual situations in academic and professional settings. Practical guidelines can be provided by counsellors through individual career counselling, in-session exercises, and homework assignments (Extremera et al., 2020). Besides, educators need to adopt "personalized teaching methods such as reflecting experiences, mentoring, modeling, role-playing, writing daily events, and summaries in the form of reports, practice, and speaking skills" (Jafari et al., 2021). These activities will enable students to increase their self-consciousness, flexibility and adaptability, and ultimately improve their levels of emotional intelligence.

As psychosocial factors mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and university students' well-being, universities should create a positive social environment inside the college community by engaging university professors and administrative personnel to respond to the psychological needs of students and aid them to build strong social networks that encourage inclusion and belongingness rather than loneliness and seclusion (Shuo et al., 2022). Offering students more physical exercise opportunities has also proved to create a stress-free environment that refocus on positive emotional experiences and raises students' feelings of life satisfaction (Wang et al., 2022). As a result, students can benefit from social support and improve their self-efficacy and self-realization.

The incorporation of intervention and prevention programs in universities is pivotal in assisting university students during stressful periods (Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2018). These programs allow the continuous evaluation of students' mental health taking into consideration various individual differences (gender, age, culture, personal skills, etc...). PREDEMA 2.0 is one of the emotional education intervention programs that was evaluated to assess its short-term and long-term effectiveness (Schoeps et al., 2020). The findings revealed that this program is suitable to university settings because it is adequate for a large and heterogenous population. Moreover, it develops students' emotional skills and empowers their psychological well-being in the short term. Nevertheless, the quality and fidelity of its implementation may have an impact on its effectiveness and achievement of the expected students' outcomes (Durlak, 2016).

**Implications and recommendations:**

The systematic review of 15 articles investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and university students' well-being has helped to come up with a synthesis of theory and practice that provides insights for future research and educational practices:

**Implications for future research**

Future studies need to investigate emotional intelligence and students' well-being taking into account various demographic, psychosocial and psychoeducational factors through conducting longitudinal studies that evaluate the impact of these variables on emotional intelligence levels over time. Besides, studies should involve university students from different disciplines and rely on performance-based measures rather than on self-reported ones to avoid the risk of bias in research results. Also, the use of quantitative research methods does not help to approach the relationship between emotional intelligence and students' well-being holistically particularly that many internal and external variables affect this relationship. Thus, the adoption of mixed research methods in future researches seems to be a promising option to achieve this aim.

Additionally, very few studies examined the effectiveness and implementation of emotional educational programs at tertiary levels. For this reason, it is recommended that psychologists, educators and researchers investigate the quality of prevention and intervention programs and suggest effective and efficient strategies for its implementation in universities.

In the Moroccan context, there is a shortage of literature that investigate developing emotional intelligence for students' well-being empowerment. As a result, researchers should provide more attention to this issue especially that a study by Jaouad et al. (2019) uncovered that Moroccan university students show perceived weakness in emotional skills, and that there is an urgent need for the integration of emotional intelligence training in curriculum development at tertiary level.

**Implications and recommendations for practice**

1. It is essential to raise awareness to the importance of university students' mental health within college life and among university professors, university staff, students, parents and researchers. And, to highlight its role in the personal and professional development of students through conferences, seminars, talks, sensitizing campaigns and others.
2. Psychologists, counselors, educators and curriculum developers should think of designing prevention and intervention programs that assist university students during stressful periods, assess their mental health on a regular basis and promote their emotional intelligence skills.
3. Universities should implement intervention and prevention programs that proved their positive impact on developing students' emotional skills and on increasing their psychological well-being.
4. Universities ought to provide students with opportunities to practice sport on campus and organize sport competitions that encourage students to exhibit competitiveness, build strong social rapport and enhance their intra- and inter-personal skills.
5. University students should benefit from counselling services that help them to face negative emotional experiences they go through.
6. Career counselling workshops are necessary to prepare university graduates for workplace challenges and equip them with prerequisite skills and strategies to succeed professionally.
7. The integration of growth development approaches, mindfulness and principles of positive psychology in curriculum development at the tertiary level may improve students' use of cognitive emotional strategies and develop their emotional intelligence.
8. The social networks among university professors, students, and administrative personnel inside universities should lead to increased students' motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, self-confidence, inclusion and autonomy.
9. University professors and educators need to adopt personalized teaching methods that respond to students' different psychological needs and help them to raise their self-consciousness and adapt to various conflictual situations.
10. The teaching of soft skills or personal skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, flexibility and others at the tertiary level, has the potential to develop students' emotional intelligence and empower their psychological well-being.

11. Universities should provide more scholarship opportunities for university students in order to alleviate the negative influence of socio-economic crises on students' mental health and that affect their academic achievement.

### Limitations

The study adds value to the literature on developing emotional intelligence for empowering university students' well-being, however, it is limited by the number of scientific articles reviewed. Also, the study focused only on students at university level, while studies on other educational levels (primary, secondary and high-school) can hold different results. Furthermore, the lack of literature on students' mental health and emotional intelligence in Morocco, did not permit to provide more insights specific to the Moroccan context and to compare them with international studies conducted on this issue. However, all the theoretical and educational implications can apply to Moroccan universities.

### Conclusion:-

The systematic review of scientific articles investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and university students' well-being provided valuable insights on developing university students' emotional intelligence. The study revealed that a set of psychosocial and socio-educational factors mediate the relationship between developing emotional intelligence and university students' well-being, and that these factors require special attention from educators, researchers, counselors, syllabus designers, parents, and university administrators so as to promote university students' emotional skills, enhance their mental health levels and contribute to their intelligent social and emotional development. Consequently, university students' holistic development has become a milestone in their academic and professional success, and a booster of sustainable development in their communities.

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