

# Emotional Intelligence Research: A Narrative Review

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## ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence research published in the last two years (2024-2025) is reviewed here including studies on the effects of emotional intelligence, the risks for low emotional intelligence, neural correlates of emotional intelligence and a couple arts interventions for increasing emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence has had positive effects on personality traits, on school and job performance, on psychological well-being and on reducing suicidality. Low levels of emotional intelligence have been reported for those having adverse childhood experiences and those who were “faking good” on emotional intelligence scales. Neural correlates of emotional intelligence have been identified via fMRIs including the temporal gyrus and the insula. Arts and dance interventions have increased emotional intelligence. Methodological limitations of this literature include the almost exclusive sampling of university students and self-reporting rather than testing of emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence, also known as emotional quotient, has been defined as the ability to understand, use and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others and overcome challenges [1]. Emotional intelligence is thought to be important for building better relationships, improving communication, enhancing problem solving, having success in school and the workplace and experiencing overall well-being.

In 1995 Daniel Goleman published a book entitled “Emotional intelligence: why it can matter more than IQ”. In his book Goleman suggested that emotional intelligence is as important as intelligence quotient (IQ) for success, including academic, professional, social and interpersonal success. He focused on four components of emotional intelligence including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. Since that time, a significant body of research has been published on emotional intelligence.

In this narrative review, research on emotional intelligence that was published in 2024-2025 is briefly summarized. This research was found on PubMed, PsycINFO and Google Scholar by entering the terms emotional intelligence and the years 2024-2025. Exclusion criteria included non-English papers,

pilot studies and proposed protocols. This current literature on emotional intelligence can be divided into four categories. These include the positive effects of emotional intelligence, risks for low emotional intelligence, underlying neural correlates and arts interventions. In this narrative review, 22 papers are briefly summarized including 17 papers on positive effects of emotional intelligence, 2 papers on risks for low levels of emotional intelligence, 1 paper on neural correlates and 2 papers on arts interventions. These are followed by a section on methodological limitations of this current literature on emotional intelligence.

## Positive Effects of Emotional Intelligence

The positive effects of emotional intelligence can be divided into 4 categories (see table 1). These include personality traits, better school and job performance, enhanced well-being and less suicidality.

## Personality Traits

Personality traits have been associated with emotional intelligence in a sample of Spanish researchers (N= 7463) [2]. Positive relationships were noted between emotional intelligence and the Big Five personality traits including openness to experience, consciousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and

emotional stability. Not surprisingly, these relationships were mediated by positive emotions and the negative relationships between these variables were mediated by negative emotions.

**Table 1: Positive effects of emotional intelligence (and first authors).**

Effects	First Authors
enhances personality traits	Hernando-Jorge, Glassie, Cao
> performance in school	Costa, Abdelrahman, Shengyo, Zhou
>performance in workplace	Mehralian, Fashafsheh, Galanis, Almogbal, Chen, Marchetti
>emotional well-being	Shengyo, Kasler, Majauskiene
<suicidality	Kansar, Darvishi

Optimism is another personality trait that has been related to emotional intelligence. In a meta-analysis of 25 studies (N=6889), emotional intelligence was associated with optimism [3]. Prosocial behavior is still another personality trait that has been related to emotional intelligence. In a systematic review and meta-analysis of 40 studies entitled “The association between emotional intelligence and prosocial behaviors in children and adolescents”, the results are given in the title [4]. Surprisingly, this relationship was especially noted in early childhood (0-to-6-year-old children).

### Better Performance in School

Emotional intelligence has been associated with better performance in both school and work settings. Better performance at school has been noted for students of several ages including high school students, university students and postgraduate students.

In an adolescent sample from Portugal (N= 222 adolescents 14-to-18-years-old), emotional intelligence was related to the students’ academic performance [5]. Not surprisingly, emotional intelligence was also related to the students’ emotional well-being.

In a study entitled “Academic resilience and its relationship with emotional intelligence and stress among university students”, a sample was recruited from 12 universities in Egypt, Jordan and Oman (N = 1833) [6]. The results are reflected by the title which suggests, as might be expected, that academic performance was greater for those with greater emotional intelligence.

Similar data were derived from a sample of students from China (N = 518) [7]. Emotional intelligence not only impacted academic achievement but also psychological well-being. This was especially noted among postgraduate students, likely because they were more serious about their studies.

Emotional intelligence has also been associated with student achievement in a systematic review and meta-analysis [8]. The authors suggested that emotional intelligence was also related to spiritual intelligence, and both, in turn, were significantly correlated with student achievement. Future research might

compare emotional and spiritual intelligence to determine their commonalities.

### Better Performance in the Workplace

Emotional intelligence has also affected job performance. Interestingly, most of the studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance are based on samples of nurses and from different countries. In a study on general practice nurses in Iran (N=385), emotional intelligence and job performance were highly related [9]. Clinical competence was a mediator of this relationship. In a study on ICU nurses in Palestine (N= 226, age range= 21 to 30 years old), emotional intelligence and job performance were highly correlated [10]. Not surprisingly, emotional intelligence was also correlated with level of education.

In a study entitled “Emotional intelligence protects nurses against quiet quitting, turnover intention and job burnout”, the results are given in the title [11]. Emotional intelligence particularly protected this sample of Greek nurses from job burnout (N= 992, mean age= 42).

Similar relationships between emotional intelligence and job performance have been reported for pharmacists in Saudi Arabia [12]. Emotional intelligence and job performance were highly correlated in this sample.

In a paper entitled “Relationships between emotional labor, job burnout and emotional intelligence: An analysis combining meta-analysis and structural equation modeling”, the results are given in the title [13]. In this analysis, emotional intelligence led to greater emotional labor (defined as the act of managing one’s own emotions and the emotions of others to meet job expectations). Emotional intelligence also led to less job burnout. The greater emotional labor is likely reciprocally related to less job burnout.

Emotional intelligence has also been related to greater engagement in pro-environmental behaviors (N= 342 young adults) [14]. In this study, greater emotional intelligence was also related to greater climate change perception and connectedness to nature. Greater climate change perception and connectedness to nature would seemingly lead to greater engagement in pro-environmental behaviors.

### Enhanced Emotional Well-Being

Emotional intelligence has also been associated with enhanced emotional well-being. It is not clear how much of this relationship is associated with the Big Five personality traits and/or the improved academic and job performance already noted because, although those relationships are likely, they have rarely been determined. An exception, for example, is the data already described that showed that emotional intelligence had an impact not only on academic achievement but also on psychological well-being in postgrad students in China [7].

Emotional intelligence has also been related to life satisfaction. In a paper entitled “Life satisfaction in emerging adults: the role of emotional and spiritual intelligence”, the results are in the title [15]. Both emotional and spiritual intelligence led to life satisfaction in this sample. Spiritual intelligence was defined as the ability to draw on spiritual resources to enhance daily life

and problem solving, a function that closely matches that of emotional intelligence.

Similarly, emotional intelligence has contributed to happiness, another form of well-being [16]. In this sample (N=831 females and 309 males, age range=18-64 years-old), both emotional intelligence and subjective health led to happiness. Extraversion in females also contributed to well-being, likely because the greater extraversion in females enabled their greater social involvement and, in turn, their greater well-being.

### Less Suicidality

Emotional intelligence has been associated with less suicidality in at least two papers in this current literature. In one study on adolescents in Pakistan (N=1017), emotional intelligence was a negative predictor of suicidal ideation [17]. In a systematic review and meta-analysis of 10 studies entitled “The role of emotional intelligence in preventing suicidal behaviors”, the results are given in the title [18]. In the meta-analysis samples (N=2532), emotional intelligence was related to less suicidal ideation as well as less suicidal behavior.

Interestingly, none of the studies on positive effects of emotional intelligence have been multivariate studies simultaneously assessing the relative contributions of these variables to enhanced well-being and less suicidality. Likely, emotional intelligence, personality traits like optimism and better academic and job performance would explain a significant amount of the variance in emotional well-being and less suicidality.

### Risks for Low Levels of Emotional Intelligence

Only two risks for low levels of emotional intelligence have been reported in this literature. They include adverse childhood experiences and “faking good” on emotional intelligence self-reports. In a paper entitled “Childhood experiences and their influence on psychological well-being and emotional intelligence”, the results are, once again, given in the title [19]. In this research on students from Saudi Arabia (N=272), the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale was used. This is comprised of five components including utilization of emotions, own emotions, regulation of own emotions, others' emotions and regulation of others' emotions. Examples of the 10 items include: 1) I know why my emotions change 2) I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them; and 3) I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice.

In a paper entitled “Faking good on self-reports versus informant-reports of emotional intelligence”, the results again are in the title [20]. Both faking good on self-reports and faking good on informant reports were reported by community members (N=81) and by students (N=151). Emotional intelligence was measured by the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Short Form which has 30 items. Examples are: 1) Expressing my emotions with words is not a problem; 2) I can deal effectively with people; and 3) I'm normally able to “get into someone's shoes”. The problem with this scale is that half the items are negative so that the distribution of responses would likely be dichotomous with some individuals having high negative and others having high positive scores. Individuals are not likely to give high ratings to both positive and negative items.

### Neural Correlates of Emotional Intelligence

Only one study addressed a potential underlying biological mechanism for emotional intelligence. In this research entitled “Dissociable neural correlates of trait and ability emotional intelligence: a resting state fMRI study”, the results are in the title [21]. Trait emotional intelligence has referred to a personality-based view of emotional intelligence, focusing on how individuals perceive and regulate their own emotions and how they interact with the emotions of others. Ability emotional intelligence, in contrast, focuses on the cognitive abilities involved in emotion processing such as perceiving and understanding emotions. Trait intelligence is typically measured by self-report questionnaires whereas ability emotional intelligence is frequently assessed through performance-based tests involving individuals solving emotional problems. Interestingly, trait and ability emotional intelligence appeared to have different neural correlates in this fMRI study, with trait emotional intelligence being associated with the temporal gyrus (located in the temporal lobe on the side of the brain that is typically involved in auditory processing) and ability emotional intelligence being associated with the insula (located beneath the temporal, frontal and parietal lobes that is typically involved in emotion processing). The different neural correlates are not surprising since the two types of emotional intelligence involve different types of processing, as already mentioned.

### Arts Interventions Increase Emotional Intelligence

Individuals with low emotional intelligence would likely benefit from interventions. However, only two interventions to increase emotional intelligence have appeared in this current literature. In one study entitled “Impact of arts activities on psychological well-being: emotional intelligence as mediator and perceived stress as moderator” the results are given in the title [22]. In this sample of Chinese students (N= 723), psychological well-being was enhanced by emotional intelligence based on structural equation modeling.

In the second study entitled “The impact of dance on enhancing social skills and emotional intelligence through creativity”, the results are also given in the title [23]. Multiple apps on different dance styles were used in this study to enhance emotional intelligence including “Just Dance Now”, “Dance Reality” and “Zumba Dance”. Increasing activity levels through dancing would likely increase serotonin (antidepressant) levels which, in turn, would enhance emotional well-being.

### Methodological Limitations of this Literature

Several methodological limitations can be noted for this current literature on emotional intelligence. They include the scarcity of recent research on this topic, the almost exclusive sampling of university students, relying on self-report rather than test-taking or observational data, and assessing the effects of emotional intelligence in cross-sectional rather than longitudinal research.

This current literature on emotional intelligence is extremely sparse as compared to the current literature on other “emotional” topics, for example, emotion dysregulation, emotional abuse and emotional neglect. Current reviews on the other topics have included dozens of papers, while this review included only 22 papers with only one on neural correlates and two on

interventions. The paucity of research on emotional intelligence may relate to its positive rather than negative effects which, not surprisingly, would draw less attention from researchers and receive less research funding. The relative scarcity of biological mechanism and intervention research on emotional intelligence may relate to its costliness but also to the general assumption that emotional intelligence, like the intelligence quotient, is hereditary or inborn and cannot be improved.

The almost exclusive sampling of university students is not unusual but, as always, it limits generalizability to other samples. University students have typically been a convenience sample for being in the classes of university researchers. The typical completion of assessments/self-reports during class time and the academic credit given for their participation has made it convenient for the students as well.

The typical problem of self-report data is its reliability. The students may be ‘faking good’ (exaggerating) or under-reporting. Performance test-taking or observational studies may be more reliable for assessing emotional intelligence.

Assessing emotional intelligence effects in cross-sectional research rather than longitudinal research limits any interpretations about causality or directionality. Relationships between emotional intelligence and its positive effects on academic performance and psychological well-being, for example, may be reciprocal or bi-directional.

Despite these methodological limitations, the current literature on emotional intelligence has been informative and interesting. Not surprisingly, most of the literature has focused on its positive effects. Future research might focus on the negative effects of having low levels of emotional intelligence and how interventions might increase the level of emotional intelligence in those who have been emotionally and socially disadvantaged by low levels of emotional intelligence.

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