Journal of Culture and Values in Education

https://cultureandvalues.org

E-ISSN: 2590-342X

Volume: 9 Issue: 2 2026

pp.345-373

Personality Correlates of Emotional Intelligence Among UAE University Students: Implications for Cross-Cultural Psychology

Smitha Dev[*a] & Shibu Rajamonyammal[b]

* Corresponding author:
Email: smitha.dev@adu.ac.ae
a. Department of Psychology, Abu Dhabi University, Abu Dhabi, UAE.
b. Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Abu Dhabi University, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Article Info
Received: March 18, 2026
Accepted: May 23, 2026
Published: June 15, 2026

10.46303/jcve.2026.32

How to cite
Dev, S., & Rajamonyammal, S. (2026). Personality Correlates of Emotional Intelligence Among UAE University Students: Implications for Cross-Cultural Psychology. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 9(2), 345-373.
https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2026.32

ABSTRACT
Although much of the literature has examined the relationship between personality and emotional intelligence in Western settings, only a few studies have examined these constructs among Arab populations, where cultural values can play a fundamental role in the psychological landscape. This cross-sectional study examined the Big Five personality traits and emotional intelligence among 200 students at a UAE university across various academic programs. Personality trait levels were moderate to high, with significant differences in Extroversion and Openness across academic majors. Unlike the negative correlations reported in the Western research paradigm, Neuroticism exhibited significant positive associations with overall emotional intelligence and with various dimensions, including Self-Awareness, Motivation, Social Skills and Empathy. Openness to Experience, in contrast, showed a negative relationship with emotional intelligence, which was unexpected. These results are analyzed within the distinct cultural framework of university students in the UAE, where Arab-Islamic collectivist values may influence the interpretation of personality traits in ways that differ from those in Western groups. While the results cannot be generalized beyond this single-institution sample, they establish a theoretically sound foundation for challenging the universal applicability of existing personality-emotional intelligence models. Additionally, they present initial evidence to inform the development of culturally relevant support services for students in higher education settings in the UAE.

KEYWORDS
Personality; emotional intelligence; extraversion; neuroticism; agreeableness; cross-cultural psychology; big five; UAE; university students; Arab-Islamic culture.

INTRODUCTION

The correlation between Big Five personality traits and emotional intelligence (EI) has been a topic of continuous research in western psychology (Costa & McCrae, 1992; John & Srivastava, 1999). EI (recognition, understanding, management and use of emotions) has consistently been associated with academic achievement, social competence, and psychological well-being (Goleman, 1995; Mayer et al., 2004; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In this literature, the personality trait of neuroticism has been found to be a strong negative correlate of EI, whereas extraversion and agreeableness have been positive associates (Petrides et al., 2007; Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2007). The results, however, are strongly based on individualistic societies of Western cultures and an important question is whether the same personality–EI relationships are found in non-Western cultures where the adaptive nature of traits can vary significantly.

The field of cross-cultural psychology has found that psychological constructs and their interrelationships are not culturally invariant (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Church, 2000). Although this is becoming more widely acknowledged, most of the personality–EI research is concentrated on WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) samples and more recent research generally adds West Asian and East Asian collectivist contexts (Fernandez-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006; Wong et al., 2009). The representation of Arabs is still significantly low.

Two previous studies are worthy of mention. Ahmed (2019) and Alansari (2006) examined the constructs that are correlated with personality amongst Arab samples and found that the factor structures are different from those in the Western world. Both studies, however, focus on the bivariate association between the Big Five traits and EI, without studying how they are associated when combined in a higher education setting. Furthermore, both studies took place in different national settings (Egypt and Kuwait, respectively), and neither of them were representative of the socio-cultural landscape of the UAE, a country with a very diverse student expatriate community, a westernized university system, and Arab-Islamic values that are predominantly collectivist. Their findings are also not theoretically explained or tested in the educational context of the Gulf region. Therefore, this research does not state that there is no prior Arab research, but that the dynamic of the personality–EI in UAE university students is still not studied using a scientific method.

The UAE is a potentially rich context for such an examination. Emotional interdependence, relational duty and social harmony have different moral connotations within collectivist Arab-Islamic context (Dwairy, 2004; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Functional meanings of traits that are seen as maladaptive in individualist contexts in the West, may therefore differ here. Neuroticism, generally found to be related to emotional instability in Western samples, might be a form of heightened emotional sensitivity that would be linked to social attunement in relationally-oriented cultural contexts (Triandis, 1995; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Oyserman et al., 2002). Conscientiousness, which correlates to EI in rule-governed Western environments, may also hinder relational flexibility valued in collectivist learning

situations. In the context of an education based on tradition, Openness to Experience, which is related to individual intellectual exploration, could have become less relevant to emotional competence (Hofstede, 2001). They are "theoretically motivated predictions" and it is not a fact, it is an empirically testable prediction of the present study.

Undergraduates are an acceptable sample group to study these dynamics – developmental issues that include the negotiation of academic demands, social identity and acquisition of emotional skills, which are all culturally inflected (Brackett et al., 2011). The UAE university context presents a further dimension, due to the UAE being composed of nationals and an expatriate population of diverse cultural backgrounds which may moderate cultural background.

The present study addresses three gaps. Second, the links between the Big Five personality traits and EI among students of the UAE universities have yet to be studied systematically, which is a significant gap in cross-cultural psychology. Second, past cross-cultural studies of personality and EI have tended to examine collectivism in the context of East Asian cultures, and investigating collectivism in the Arab-Islamic context will provide a means for testing the generalizability of the collectivist influence on personality–EI dynamics or whether the influence is culture specific. Third, although some theoretical positions have been put forward on redefining neuroticism as adaptive emotional sensitivity in the Arab context, these have not been empirically examined in the context of Arab higher education.

Based on this reasoning, four hypotheses are advanced: H1 – neuroticism will be negatively correlated with EI in the sample of UAE students, whereas it was negative in Western samples; H2 – conscientiousness will be negatively correlated with the social dimension of EI (empathy and social skills) reflecting that there is a tension between rule-oriented behaviors and the other dimension of EI, which is the relational dimension; H3 – openness to experience will be negatively correlated with EI as the intellectual exploration dimension is less salient in tradition-oriented systems; and H4 – extraversion and agreeableness will have weaker correlations with EI than reported in Western samples, due to the culturally different norms governing social expression.

Test of these hypotheses adds to the central issue in cross-cultural psychology on the universality versus culture specificity of personality–EI relationships: whether the relationship between personality and EI in Arabs and Islamists is different from the individualist and East Asian collectivism, respectively. An application to a culturally responsive EI development program and student support services in higher education in UAE is possible practically. From the start of the study, it is understood that the convenience sampling of 200 students from one institution from the United Arab Emirates restricts generalizability, and that the contribution is not meant to be generalisable to Arab or Islamic psychology as a whole, but is theoretical in nature and to stimulate hypothesis generation for future cross-cultural studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two theoretical limits need explicit mention before discussing the method, since they directly influence interpretation of the present findings. First, the concepts of Islamic psychological thought, such as muraqaba (self-monitoring awareness) and taqwa (conscientious moral restraint), were used to offer theoretical frames for understanding how cultural frameworks in the Arab-Islamic world can give different functional meanings to emotional and personality traits. The constructs were not operationalized in the present study, however, as no item on the EI or personality measures directly assessed muraqaba, taqwa or equivalent Islamic self-regulatory concepts, and no validated Islamic psychology scale was administered. They are, therefore, not only interpretive but also generative in this context: they provide culturally-informed language for theorizing or explaining, for example, how neuroticism is related to emotional sensitivity, which cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by the present data. It is suggested to use validated instruments like the Muslim Personality Inventory (Haque & Masuan, 2002) or Islamic Moral Attainment Scale to directly test these linkages in future studies. Second, collectivism was not measured at the individual level in this study, as the literature suggests that the UAE has a collectivist culture (Hofstede, 2001; Dwairy, 2004); however, no cultural values scale (e.g., the Individualism-Collectivism Scale, Hofstede, 2001; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) was administered to the participants. Because of this, the hypothesis that neuroticism acts differently due to collectivist orientation is not testable in this study, and thus is a culturally contextualized inference. Therefore, the present results must be treated as empirical generalizations from the sample of students studied in the UAE and, as such, as a basis for hypothesis formation and not as causal explanations. A more methodologically sound follow-up study would involve the collection of individual-level measures of collectivist values and salience of religious identity to experimentally test the interaction between personality and EI.

Personality Traits: The Big Five Model

The Five-Factor Model (FFM), or Big Five personality model, has become the most widely accepted model for describing personality structure across diverse populations (McCrae & Costa, 1997; John et al., 2008). The model theorizes personality in five general dimensions namely Extraversion (sociability, assertiveness, and positive emotionality), Agreeableness (trust, altruism, and cooperation), Conscientiousness (self-discipline, achievement orientation, and orderliness), Neuroticism (emotional instability, anxiety, and stress vulnerability), and Openness to Experience (intellectual curiosity, aesthetic sensitivity, and imagination) (Costa & McCrae, 1992). These five dimensions are reasonably replicated across cultures, in that the factor pattern emerges in other languages and cultural settings (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005).

Cross-cultural researchers have, however, raised questions about the universality of the Big Five model, stating that the structure and expression of personality are culturally determined and therefore not universal (Church, 2000; Cheung et al., 2011). Culture-specific dimensions of personality, as well as differences in the predictive validity of Big Five traits across cultural contexts, have been observed in studies of non-Western settings (Heine & Buchtel, 2009).

Among Arab populations in particular, the distribution of personality traits and their associations with outcome variables have been shown to differ significantly between Arab and Western samples (Alansari, 2006; Ahmed, 2019). As an example, the collectivist values dominant in Arab cultures can affect the social desirability of traits like agreeableness and extraversion, which are less functional in interpersonal relations, with considerations of family requirements and communal harmony taking precedence over personal success (Dwairy, 2004).

Emotional Intelligence: Conceptual Foundations

The conceptual framework of emotional intelligence as the capacity to regulate personal as well as other people's emotions and feelings, to be discriminant between them, and to utilize the information to inform one's self-thinking and behavior has become a key construct to adaptive psychology functioning (Kgosiemang & Khoza, 2022; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Later theoretical efforts have distinguished ability-based models, grounded in cognitive-emotional skills (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), from mixed-method models that include personality-like characteristics and competencies (Goleman, 1995; Bar-On, 2006). A classroom-based emotional intelligence intervention was found to improve students' self-regulation and academic engagement among undergraduate students in the UAE (Dev et al., 2025a; 2025b) .The concept of emotional intelligence, as proposed by the mixed-model approach underpinning most EI assessment tools, comprises the competencies of Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Empathy, and Social Skills that promote intrapersonal and interpersonal effectiveness (Goleman, 1998).

Studies have consistently shown positive correlations between emotional intelligence and academic achievement, leadership effectiveness, mental health, and relationship quality (Brackett et al., 2011; Schutte et al., 2007; O'Boyle et al., 2011). Emotional intelligence is also more strongly linked to stress management, academic persistence, and social adjustment, particularly among university students (Parker et al., 2004; Qualter et al., 2012). Nevertheless, most EI studies have been carried out in Western-based education systems, with little focus on how cultural structures influence the development, expression, and functional importance of emotional competencies (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006).

Personality-Emotional Intelligence Relationships: Western Paradigms

Western studies investigating the relationship between personality and EI have identified common patterns, particularly involving neuroticism. The evidence from meta-analytic studies indicates that neuroticism and other dimensions of EI are associated with moderate-to-strong negative relationships, with effect sizes ranging from r = -.40 to r = -.50 (Van der Linden et al., 2012; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2016). The theoretical basis of this negative interdependence is the conceptualization of neuroticism as a feature of emotional instability, anxiety potential, and lack of negative emotion control- characteristics that are essentially incompatible with the emotional recognition, understanding, and management capacities that define emotional intelligence (Petrides et al., 2007).

Conscientiousness has also been associated with emotional intelligence, particularly with the Self-Management and motivational dimensions, indicating shared variance in self-

regulatory abilities (Tok & Morali, 2009). Extraversion shows modest positive associations with social aspects of EI, which is consistent with the interpersonal orientation that describes the two constructs (Austin et al., 2005). Agreeableness demonstrates variable yet mostly positive relationships between elements of empathy and social awareness of EI (Schutte et al., 1998). Openness to experience has shown inconsistent associations with EI across studies, with some indicating positive associations with cognitive flexibility and perspective-taking, whereas others show minimal links (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2005).

These patterns of Western origin, though, are based on cultural assumptions about the nature of adaptive emotional functioning that do not necessarily apply in collectivist situations. The maladaptive nature of neuroticism is a conceptualization based on individualistic values that emphasize emotional autonomy and an internal locus of emotional control (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Conversely, collectivist models can view emotional sensitivity, though it may involve anxiety or heightened emotional responsiveness, as useful for understanding social processes and for being sensitive to relational commitments (Oyserman et al., 2002).

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Personality and Emotional Intelligence

Research on cross-cultural issues has increased, and findings indicate that the structure, expression, and functional meaning of personality traits and emotional intelligence differ systematically across cultural settings (Matsumoto et al., 2008; Church, 2000). Among collectivist Asian groups, research has reported various patterns of personality outcome relationships that differ from Western samples, including weaker personality extraversion with subjective well-being and stronger personality agreeableness with social adjustment (Lucas et al., 2000; Kwan et al., 1997).

Within the framework of emotional intelligence in particular, studies in East Asian regions have found that cultural display rules, emotion regulation, and the social role of emotions differ significantly from Western trends (Gunkel et al., 2016). To illustrate, emotional restraint, which could be viewed as a lack of emotional expressiveness in Western cultures, is a culturally desirable form of emotional control in most Asian cultures (Matsumoto et al., 2008). Similarly, emotional competencies that are culturally adaptive in collectivist contexts include sensitivity to others' emotions and an emphasis on relational harmony rather than emotional expression (Kim & Sherman, 2007).

Although these findings have been reported in East Asian research, Arab populations remain grossly underrepresented in the cross-cultural personality and EI literature. The limited research in Arabic settings has shown some surprising results, such as varied factor patterns in personality measures and different correlations among psychological constructs than those observed in Western samples (Ahmed, 2019; Alansari, 2006). The cultural systems of the Arab people are founded on the Islamic principles and collective societies, which focus on emotional interdependence, loyalty to the family and community-based obligation, and these can all significantly change the way personality traits are expressed and how they can be associated with emotional competencies (Dwairy, 2004; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000).

In Arab collectivist culture, emotional sensitivity and awareness of others may constitute culturally adaptive abilities and help navigate complex relational obligations and preserve social harmony (Triandis, 1995). The same traits described as neuroticism in Western models, such as emotional responsiveness and a sense of potential interpersonal conflict, could be adaptive in cultural contexts characterized by high relational sensitivity and the ability to anticipate social demands (Dwairy, 2006). This implies that the negative neuroticism-EI correlation reported in Western studies might not yield the same results in Arab populations, or may even reverse direction.

Personality and Emotional Intelligence in University Students

University students are a very important group for studying the relationship between personality and EI because this is a developmental stage when students are challenged by various emotional and social issues, such as academic stress, identity, and the development of independent social networks (Arnett, 2000; Brackett et al., 2011). Western-based research studies have shown that personality traits and emotional intelligence predict positive, independent, and interactive academic performance, psychological adjustment, and persistence of university students (Qualter et al., 2012; Poropat, 2009). Traditional EI frameworks can be modified to reflect Islamic values, Emirati cultural norms, and the multicultural nature of UAE classrooms (Dev, Lababidi, & Al-Nidawi, 2025).

Nevertheless, university life in the Arab world can be characterized by distinctive developmental experiences and emotional challenges shaped by cultural values and expectations. For Emirati and Arab students, attending university can involve an environment of ongoing family integration, anticipation of cultural traditions, and exposure to globalized educational material, as well as grappling with gender roles that may not align with Western standards (Ridge, 2014; Shaw et al., 2012). These cultural contexts can help identify which personality traits and emotional competencies are most conducive to adaptive university success and well-being.

Studies examining variation in academic discipline by personality traits have produced divergent results, with some reporting characteristic personality profiles across different areas of study (Vedel, 2016). For example, students in the helping professions and other human-centered disciplines tend to score higher on agreeableness and openness, whereas business students tend to score higher on extraversion (Larson, Rottinghaus, & Borgen, 2002). The fact that the same patterns are replicated in Arab educational settings, or how they may be connected to emotional intelligence, remains to be empirically investigated.

Research Gap

Despite a lot of research conducted on personality-emotional intelligence relationships, several gaps are critical and restrict our judgments about these constructs in different cultural backgrounds:

1. Geographic and Cultural Underrepresentation: Most of the studies of research in personality-EI have been done in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic (WEIRD)

societies (Henrich et al., 2010). The Arab folks (and the Gulf Arab situation, in particular, the UAE) are still grossly underrepresented in the literature on international psychology, which limits the generalizability of existing theories and models.

2. Assumption of Universal Relationships: The published work has assumed that many of the relationships between personality and EI documented in Western samples are applicable universally, with minimal empirical evidence of this assumption across different cultural settings. The theoretical mechanisms advanced to account for personality-EI relationships (e.g., neuroticism as a result of weakness in emotion regulation) have culturally biased assumptions about adaptive emotional performance.

3. Limited Exploration of Cultural Adaptation: There is little research on this topic that has empirically determined the impact that collectivist cultural values, Islamic systems, and Arab social arrangements can have on the functional meaning of personality traits and their associations with emotional competencies. It also remains largely unexplored whether traits described as maladaptive within the Western paradigm could be adaptive in other cultural settings.

4. Absence of Within-Culture Variation: The limited research conducted in an Arab setting has generally considered Arab populations to be homogeneous, even in the presence of significant within-culture variation due to factors like nationality (local vs. expatriate), gender, and academic discipline, which may have affected the personality-EI pattern.

5. Lack of Implications for Practice: Due to the scarcity of culturally specific research on personality-EI relationships in Arab cultures, developing culturally sensitive student support services, counseling interventions, and emotional intelligence-training interventions in the educational environments of Middle Eastern contexts would be restricted.

The present study addresses these gaps by providing empirical examination of personality-EI relationships within a UAE university context, exploring both overall patterns and variations across demographic and academic factors, and interpreting findings through culturally informed theoretical lenses.

Research Objectives

The following specific objectives are pursued in this study:

Objective 1: To present the personality trait profiles (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience) of the university students in the United Arab Emirates.

Objective 2: To test the differences in personality traits between UAE university students depending on the gender, nationality (UAE vs. non-UAE) and academic discipline.

Objective 3: To examine the relationship between the big five personality dimensions and emotional intelligence dimensions (Self-awareness, self-management, motivation, social skills, and empathy) with UAE university students.

Objective 4: To make comparisons with observed personality-emotional intelligence association and patterns reported in Western studies and establish convergences and differences that could reflect cultural impacts.

Objective 5: To present empirically based recommendations of culturally responsive student support services and emotional intelligence intercession in Middle Eastern institutions of higher learning.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical background of this study is anchored on an integrative theoretical framework that relies on three mutually complementary perspectives:

1. The Five-Factor Model of Personality

The conceptual framework of personality traits is based on the Big Five personality model (McCrae and Costa, 1997). This model is based on the five general dimensions that encompass Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness to Experience which describe basic dimensions of individual differences in cognition, emotion, and behavior. Although we accept cross-cultural evidence for these five dimensions, we take a critical approach that challenges the notion that the psychological meaning, behavioral manifestation as well as functional importance of these traits are cross-cultural (Church, 2000).

2. Mixed Model of Emotional Intelligence

The present paper applies the conceptualization of emotional intelligence used by Goleman (1998) that is a mixed model, and includes five interconnected competencies: (1) Self-Awareness (awareness of own emotions and influences), (2) Self-Management (control of disruptive emotions and adapt to changes), (3) Motivation (drive to improve and continue despite the challenges), (4) Empathy (understanding the emotions and views of other people), and (5) Social Skills (relationship management and network building). This model, although formulated in the western context, offers an all-inclusive framework of analyzing emotional competencies of both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions.

3. Cultural Psychology and Collectivism-Individualism Framework

In interpreting personality-EI relationships in the UAE context, we appeal to cultural psychology insights that underscore how cultural meaning systems influence psychological processes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). In particular, we use the collectivism-individualism paradigm to realize how the Arab cultural values that emphasis on relational interdependence, family loyalty, and communal obligation could modify the manifestation of personality traits and the functional value of emotional competencies.

Personality traits in individualistic cultures are theorized as stable internal dispositions that comparatively define behavior, irrespective of situational context, with emotional intelligence also used to explain individual ability in emotional self-regulation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Collectivist frameworks, on the other hand, view personality and emotive functioning as relational and rate traits and competencies by their role in achieving social

harmony, family cohesion, and fulfilling role responsibilities (Triandis, 1995; Oyserman et al.,2002).

In this theoretical integration, several culturally sensitive hypotheses that are not in harmony with Western paradigms are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (Neuroticism-EI Relationship): Contrary to the reported negative relationships in Western studies, neuroticism might correlate positively and/or not at all with emotional intelligence in the UAE context, as emotional sensitivity helps one be aware of relationship dynamics and consider social obligations in a collectivist context.

Hypothesis 2 (Agreeableness-EI Relationship): It might be found that Agreeableness shows more positive relationships with the dimensions of emotional intelligence than in Western samples, due to the greater cultural emphasis on interpersonal harmony and cooperation in Arab collectivist cultures.

Hypothesis 3 (Cultural Moderation): The intensity and direction of personality-EI relationships in UAE national students (more rooted in traditional Arab-Islamic cultural schemes) and international students (more exposed to diverse cultural orientations) may differ, implying that cultural values mediate these relationships.

Combining the perspectives of trait psychology, emotional intelligence theory, and cultural psychology, this model situates personality-EI relationships within the culturally specific rather than the universally determined. Empirical patterns are available to refute expectations of Western derivations, while they can be explained within the theoretical framework of cross-cultural interplay.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design applied in this study is a cross-sectional quantitative design because it aimed to explore the personality trait profiles of university students in the United Arab Emirates and to analyze the relationships between the Big Five personality traits and the dimensions of emotional intelligence. Cross-sectional designs are suitable for testing interactions among psychological variables at a single point in time and are prevalent in studies of personality and emotional intelligence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The correlational analysis was used to investigate the nature and strength of the relationship between personality traits and emotional intelligence, as well as whether there were potential differences in these variables across demographic and academic variables.

Participants

The study sample included 200 college students studying at Abu Dhabi University in the 2024-2025 academic year. The participants were conveniently sampled from diverse academic programs at the university. There were 67 male students (33.5%) and 133 female students (66.5%), which reflects the common gender distribution in many institutions of higher learning in the UAE, where females are usually the largest enrollee group. Regarding nationality, 96

respondents (48%) were UAE nationals, and 104 respondents (52%) were non-UAE nationals, reflecting the multicultural aspect of the Emirates' higher education, where both local and international students coexist in their studies.

Although the current study is based on a convenience sample from a single institution, there are a number of reasons why it is considered suitable for the purposes of this exploratory study. The sample size of 200 is the minimum recommended for correlational studies (Cohen, 1992) and has sufficient statistical power to detect medium-sized effects ($r \geq .20$) at the conventional $\alpha = .05$ level with > .80 power. Primary analyses (Pearson correlations and group comparisons) are specific to this sample size and do not require larger samples to result in an interpretable analysis. Second, the sample size that was used was demographically meaningful when it comes to the research questions of this study because it included UAE nationals (48%) and non-UAE expatriates (52%), a near balance of gender representation compared to the enrollment pattern of the ADU and a representation of six different academic disciplines. This internal diversity enables meaningful comparisons across subgroups but is within the bounds of a single-institution study. Third, the student body at Abu Dhabi University is truly multicultural and reflects the overall demographic makeup of the UAE, a nation where non-nationals account for about 88% of the population, and an ideal, though not necessarily representative, environment to study aspects of personality and emotional intelligence in the Arab-Islamic collectivist context. Fourth, the study is clearly intended to be exploratory and hypothesis-generating rather than confirmatory or population-representative. Single site convenience sampling is common in cross-cultural psychology research in the initial phases of a project to see if culturally specific patterns require further systematic investigation, prior to conducting larger replication studies across sites (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Smith & Fischer, 2008). The conclusions of this study must therefore be considered as preliminary and theoretical data for students at the Abu Dhabi University during 2024-2025, and not as generalizations about the UAE, Arab, or Gulf populations in general. The work needs to be extended in the future using stratified sampling from different institutions and different emirates to generate a higher level of representational validity**.**

Six major academic programs were sampled, which included Accounting (*n*=22, 11%), Bachelor of Business Administration (*n*=51, 25.5%), Digital Marketing (*n*=26, 13%), Finance and Fintech (*n*=39, 19.5%), Human Nutrition and Dietetics (*n*=28, 14%), and other (*n*=34, 17). Such a variety of academic areas of focus enables us to analyze possible differences between field-of-study personality traits and emotional intelligence. All of them were 18 years or older and gave informed consent before participating. The inclusion criteria required that participants be full-time students currently enrolled at the university and able to read and understand English, as the survey instruments were written in English, the university's primary language of instruction. It is important to recognize that using a convenience sample from a single institution limits the scope of interpretation. The results presented in this research pertain specifically to the student body of Abu Dhabi University during the 2024–2025 academic year. They should not be

generalized to all university students in the UAE or to broader Arab or Gulf populations. This limitation is clearly reflected in both the analysis of the findings and the conclusions drawn throughout the manuscript.

Instruments

To identify the key variables of interest in the study, two standardized psychological instruments were used. The Big Five Inventory (BFI), which is a popular 44-item measure, was used to measure the Big Five personality traits; this is a reliable measure in that it measures five key dimensions of personality: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience (John et al.,1991). The BFI is based on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (Disagree strongly) to 5 (Agree strongly), and items such as items such as 'I see myself as someone who is talkative' (Extraversion) and 'I see myself as someone who worries a lot' (Neuroticism). The dimensions considered in the personality test are scored by averaging the answers to the relevant questions, with possible scores ranging from 1 to 5. Nevertheless, to conduct this study, the raw sum scores were used, and hence the ranges of the observed scores in the data. The BFI has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties across diverse cultural contexts, with reasonable reliability and validity coefficients (John & Srivastava, 1999).

The Arabic version of the Big Five Inventory has been psychometrically validated in university samples in the Arab world. Alansari (2016) evaluated the psychometric properties of the Arabic BFI by testing it on 685 Kuwaiti undergraduate students and reported the good internal consistency ratings for all five subscales (α = .83 for Neuroticism, α = .82 for Extraversion, α = .79 for Openness, α = .82 for Agreeableness, and α = .90 for Conscientiousness). In more recent years, a validation study of the Arabic BFI-2 Short Form was carried out with 1,560 undergraduate students at Kuwait University, which yielded satisfactory internal consistency (α ranging from .73 to .79) and convergent validity with the NEO-PI-R with mean inter-scale correlations of .62. This five-factor structure is replicated in these samples of Arabs, and it indicates the instrument's structural validity in the context of education in the Gulf. The present study used the original 44 item BFI that has been applied to cross-cultural studies and has shown acceptable to good psychometric properties among various language groups (John & Srivastava, 19).

The Goleman Emotional Intelligence Scale was used to measure emotional intelligence. This scale operationalizes mixed-model conceptualization of emotional intelligence that includes five core competencies: Self-Awareness (the ability to identify and comprehend one’s own emotions), Self-Management (the ability to control emotions and adjust to various situations), Motivation (internal drive to reach goals and persevere when things are difficult), Social Skills (the capability to deal with relationships and develop networks) and Empathy (understanding and responding to the feelings of others accordingly). The scale uses a Likert-type response format to measure the level or frequency with which respondents tend to practice emotionally intelligent behaviors. Overall emotional intelligence and subscale scores for each of the five dimensions were calculated for analysis. This tool has been applied across

cultures and has demonstrated sufficient reliability and construct validity for measuring emotional competencies (Goleman, 1998; Bar-On, 2006).

The EI measure was 30 items across five 6-item subscales (Emotional Awareness, Managing One's Emotions, Self-Motivation, Empathy, and Social Skills) rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Disagree Very Much to 6 = Agree Very Much); subscale scores were item sums (range 6–36) and the total EI score was the sum of all five subscales (range 30–180). Internal consistency of the present samples was satisfactory in the case of the Arabic BFI (Extraversion α = .85–.90; Alansari, 2016) and good in the case of EI (α = .90; Agreeableness α = .82, Conscientiousness α = .90, Neuroticism α = .83, Openness α = .79, Emotional Awareness (α =.87).Manage emotions α = .82, Self-Motivation α = .84, Empathy α = .83, Social Skills α = .81, Overall EI α = .90

Arabian samples are not as extensive in their validation of EI instruments, but are growing. One should recognize that as of yet there is no specific Arabic validation of the exact scale used in this study which is based on Goleman's self-assessment model. A validated Arabic version of the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10), which confirms the same five-competencies framework, however, showed acceptable internal consistency and convergence and concurrent validities in Arab samples with the unidimensional model scoring best. The Arabic BEIS-10 demonstrated very good internal consistency (McDonald's ω = .94, Cronbach's α = .94; both in a Lebanese sample of 449 adults) and scalar, metric, and configural invariance in males and females. The results indirectly support the cross-cultural transferability of Goleman's model of EI to the Arab context. However, it is recognized that the lack of direct Arabic validation of the instrument used in this study is a limitation and further studies should be conducted using a fully validated Arabic language EI instrument to add a sense of psychometric confidence of this population.

Data Collection Procedure

The research was conducted in regular classes at Abu Dhabi University under the auspices of the course instructors. It was approved by the institutional review board at Abu Dhabi University. Students were given an information sheet that informed them of the study's purpose, their right to participate freely, the confidentiality procedure, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Respondents who were willing to participate signed an informed consent form before receiving the survey packet. The questionnaire was administered in a paper-and-pencil format and took about 25-30 minutes to complete. Participants were first asked to fill out a short demographic survey that collected information on gender, nationality, age, and academic program of study. This was followed by the Big Five Inventory and the Emotional Intelligence Scale, which were administered in a counterbalanced order to control for potential order effects.

Data collection was conducted with research assistants who had been trained in standardized administration procedures to respond to questions and ensure that instruments were completed correctly. The participants were advised to provide true answers and reminded

that there were no correct or incorrect answers. To maintain confidentiality, the survey questionnaires were placed in sealed envelopes and assigned identification numbers; no names or other identifying details were written on the instruments. The data were collected over four weeks during the fall semester. Every respondent was given a token of appreciation for their participation, and contact details were provided to those interested in the study results, allowing them to request a summary of the findings after the research was completed.

Data Analysis

Categorical and quantitative variables were expressed as frequencies (percentages) and means ± *SD*, respectively. An independent *t*-test / One-way ANOVA test (F-test) was used to compare quantitative parameters between categories. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used to assess the relationship between quantitative parameters. For all statistical interpretations, $\alpha = .05$ was set as the threshold for statistical significance, and the expected *p*-values are reported throughout. Statistical analysis was performed by using the statistical software package IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28).

Prior to the main analyses, the assumption of normality was examined for all study variables. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used, in addition to skewness and kurtosis values, given the small size of the sample (n=200) Results showed that all the subscales of the Big Five personality traits and all the EI dimensions had approximately normal distributions, with skewness and kurtosis values falling within the acceptable range for normality (i.e., skewness within ±2 and kurtosis within ±7)..The acceptable range is within ±2 (George & Mallery, 2010) which falls in the acceptable range. Shapiro-Wilk test results showed that the majority of the variables were not significantly different from normal distribution ($p > .05$). These findings warrant the application of the parametric statistical procedures such as Pearson correlation coefficients, independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA in the present study.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards for research involving human participants as stipulated by the American Psychological Association and Abu Dhabi University's research ethics policies. Approval from the Institutional Review Board was granted before participants were recruited and data were collected. The participation was purely voluntary, and there were no penalties for non-participation or withdrawal. All participants provided informed consent after being fully informed about the purpose of the study, research procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality protections, and the rights of a research participant. The confidentiality of the participants was ensured by using identification numbers instead of names, storing all data securely, and limiting access to the data to authorized research personnel only. Participants were informed that aggregated findings might be published or presented at academic conferences, but that no individual identifying information would be disclosed. The study posed minimal risk to participants, involving only the completion of self-report questionnaires on personality and emotional competencies, with no deception or sensitive topics that might cause distress.

RESULTS

In the next section, the results of the study are presented in three subsequent stages. Descriptive statistics are presented for the Big Five personality traits, followed by gender comparisons, nationality comparisons and academic discipline comparisons. Lastly, Pearson correlation coefficients are provided between the dimensions of the personality scales and the emotional intelligence subscales, and the pattern is interpreted in the light of the culturally based hypotheses proposed above.

Table 1.

Personality Traits of University Students in the United Arab Emirates

Descriptive statistics for Personality traits				
Personality traits	Mean ± SD	Median (IQR)	Minimum	Maximum
Extroversion	26.8 ± 6.8	28 (21 - 34)	15.0	37.0
Agreeableness	32.1 ± 4.7	31 (31 - 36.5)	14.0	38.0
Conscientiousness	32.7 ± 4.5	33 (31 - 36)	14.0	39.0
Neuroticism	28.4 ± 7.5	31 (19 - 34)	16.0	40.0
Openness to Experience	31.4 ± 4.2	32 (28 - 34)	18.0	38.0

UAE university students demonstrated moderately high levels across all Big Five personality dimensions, with conscientiousness (M = 32.7, SD = 4.5) and agreeableness (M = 32.1, SD = 4.7) showing the highest mean scores and relatively low variability, In contrast neuroticism (M = 28.4, SD = 7.5) and extroversion (M = 26.8, SD = 6.8) exhibited greater individual variation as indicated by larger standard deviations and interquartile ranges.

Table 2.

Comparison of Extraversion Scores by Gender, Nationality, and Academic Discipline Among UAE University Students

		Mean	SD	N	Test statistics		p
Gender	Male	25.9	6.9	67	T	1.26	0.208
	Female	27.2	6.8	133			
Nationality	UAE	27.6	6.5	96	T	1.68	0.095
	Others	26.0	7.0	104			
Subject of study	Accounting	24.7	6.8	22	F	2.67*	0.023
	BBA	27.0	6.1	51			
	Digital Marketing	26.2	7.6	26			
	Finance and fintech	24.9	6.0	39			
	Human Nutrition & Dietetics	30.3	7.6	28			
	Others	27.3	6.8	34			

*: - Significant at 0.05 l level

Extroversion scores did not differ significantly by gender (t = 1.26, p = .208) or nationality (t = 1.68, p = .095), but varied significantly across academic disciplines (F = 2.67, p = .023), with

Human Nutrition & Dietetics students reporting the highest extroversion levels (M = 30.3, SD = 7.6) and Accounting students the lowest (M = 24.7, SD = 6.8).

The levels of **agreeableness** were stable and not highly dependent on gender, nationality, or academic discipline, with all subgroups having mean scores exceeding 31 and a standard deviation of less than 6, indicating that agreeableness was a consistent individual trait among UAE university students, irrespective of their demographic and academic backgrounds.

Conscientiousness scores showed no significant differences by gender (t = 0.77, p = .440), nationality (t = 1.21, p = .226), or academic discipline (F = 1.94, p = .090), indicating uniformly high conscientiousness across all demographic and academic subgroups with mean scores ranging from 31.3 to 34.5.

Neuroticism levels demonstrated no significant variation by gender (t = 0.1, p = .924), nationality (t = 0.65, p = .519), or academic discipline (F = 1.7, p = .137), with mean scores consistently around 28 across all subgroups despite the presence of moderate individual variability as reflected in standard deviations ranging from 5.9 to 8.4.

Openness to Experience showed no significant differences by gender (t = 0.12, p = .901) or nationality (t = 0.48, p = .635), however it varied significantly across academic disciplines (F = 2.54, p = .030), with Human Nutrition & Dietetics students exhibiting the highest openness levels (M = 33.9, SD = 3.6) compared to other majors that clustered around means of 30.4 to 31.3.

Table 4.

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Big Five Personality Traits and Emotional Intelligence Dimensions

Emotional Intelligence	Extroversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness to Experience
Self Awareness	-0.05	0.056	-0.065	0.146*	-0.045
Self management	-0.067	-0.057	-0.106	0.034	-0.047
Motivation	-0.052	-0.087	-0.114	0.154*	-0.107
Social Skills	-0.096	-0.119	-0.14*	0.181*	-0.116
Empathy	-0.096	-0.05	-0.171*	0.155*	-0.071
Overall EI	-0.082	-0.105	-0.124	0.237**	-0.233**

**: - Significant at 0.01 level, *: - Significant at 0.05 level

Emotional intelligence demonstrated weak to negligible correlations with extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness across most dimensions. Neuroticism showed significant positive associations with Self-Awareness (r = .146, p = .039), Motivation (r = .154, p = .030), Social Skills (r = .181, p = .010), Empathy (r = .155, p = .028), and Overall EI (r = .237, p = .001). Conscientiousness showed significant negative correlations with Social Skills (r = -.140, p = .048)

and Empathy (r = -.171, p = .015). Openness to Experience showed a significant negative correlation with Overall EI (r = -.233, p = .001).

Note: N = 200. *p < .05 (exact values: Self-Awareness × Neuroticism p = .039; Motivation × Neuroticism p = .030; Social Skills × Neuroticism p = .010; Social Skills × Conscientiousness p = .048; Empathy × Neuroticism p = .028; Empathy × Conscientiousness p = .015). **p < .01 (Overall EI × Neuroticism p = .001; Overall EI × Openness p = .001).

DISCUSSION

This research investigated the Big Five personality traits and their associations with emotional intelligence among 200 university students at Abu Dhabi University in the UAE. The results show both similarities and differences compared with trends observed in Western studies, suggesting that cultural context may significantly influence the relationship between personality traits and emotional intelligence. These findings should be interpreted with caution, as they stem from a convenience sample limited to one institution. They do not serve as conclusive evidence for Arab or Islamic psychology on a broader scale; instead, they provide theoretically informed preliminary insights that challenge the presumed universality of Western models linking personality and emotional intelligence, highlighting the need for further exploration across various Arab educational settings.

The cultural interpretations offered in the present work, such as the hypotheses regarding the psychological functional meaning of neuroticism and the moderation effect of collectivist Arab-Islamic values on the relationship between openness and emotional competence, are theoretical and not causally-proven, and were chosen to deliberately and methodologically limit the scope of the research and development. The present findings are made available in this spirit: the phenomenon of correlations between personality types and EI is statistically established, whereas the cultural explanation proposed to account for such phenomenon is a theoretically-motivated inference from established theories rather than a conclusion based on the direct measurement of cultural values (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995; Hofstede, 2001). For example, the negative relationship between Openness to Experience and overall EI is interpreted in the light of an array of values, which are embedded in tradition, that prevail in the educational context of the Gulf Arab population (a reading consistent with Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions framework); although the mediation role of specific values such as respect for tradition was not tested formally via mediation modeling, the existence and direction of the personality–EI relationships represented such an empirical precondition that it was necessary for the construction of a meaningful model. The present study has provided the empirical basis for the development of such causal models, and future research should use the valuable instruments of validated cultural values, such as Schwartz's (1992) Schwartz Values Survey or Triandis and Gelfand's (1998) Individualism–Collectivism Scale, to allow for formal mediation analyses that can test whether the patterns observed here can be causally attributed to cultural orientation.

Consistent with the predictions derived from collectivist cultural theory, university students in the UAE exhibited moderately elevated scores across all dimensions of the Big Five personality traits. Among these, conscientiousness and agreeableness were identified as the most significant characteristics. This profile aligns with existing research conducted in collectivist cultures, where traits such as interdependence, social harmony, and duty-oriented behaviors are culturally supported (Allik & McCrae, 2004; Schmitt et al., 2007). Additionally, it reflects the educational and familial socialization practices in the UAE that prioritize academic responsibility, goal-oriented behavior, collaboration, and conflict avoidance (Gaad et al., 2006). The noteworthy consistency of these two traits across various groups defined by gender, nationality, and academic discipline suggests that they embody deeply rooted cultural values rather than mere individual variations — a trend that carries significant implications for psychological assessment within Arab populations. Conversely, the considerable fluctuations noted in extraversion and neuroticism imply that certain traits can still be influenced by individual differences and disciplinary contexts even within a collectivist framework. This observation aligns with findings highlighting within-culture diversity in personality studies (Schmitt et al., 2007).

The differences observed in extraversion levels across disciplines—where nutrition and dietetics students exhibit the highest scores and accounting students the lowest—align with Holland's (1997) theory of person-environment fit. This indicates that the alignment between personality traits and occupational roles functions similarly in educational settings within the UAE, mirroring findings from Western vocational studies (Nye et al., 2012; Spokane et al., 2000). Furthermore, the elevated openness scores observed among nutrition students likely reflect the field’s emphasis on scientific inquiry, patient-centered care, and its dynamic nature, which tends to attract individuals with strong intellectual curiosity and adaptable learning approaches.

The primary theoretical contribution of this study is the observed positive correlation between neuroticism and emotional intelligence. This relationship contrasts with the negative correlation consistently found in Western populations (Petrides et al., 2007; Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). Confirming hypothesis H1, this finding offers initial empirical evidence within a UAE university setting for the culturally adaptive reinterpretation of neuroticism as suggested by cross-cultural psychological theories. In Western individualistic contexts, neuroticism is typically viewed as indicative of emotional instability, negative affectivity, and inadequate emotion regulation (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Conversely, in Arab-Islamic collectivist environments, the increased emotional sensitivity and interpersonal awareness that Western measures label as neuroticism may fulfill fundamentally different social roles: enhancing understanding of others' emotional conditions, allowing for rapid identification of relational disturbances, and aiding in the preservation of harmonious social connections essential for collective well-being (Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Matsumoto et al., 2008). What Western frameworks often pathologize as emotional reactivity may reflect a culturally adaptive trait that favors interpersonal sensitivity in this context

This interpretation is further reinforced by the Islamic cultural context in which this research is situated. The focus of Islamic psychology on muraqaba (Self-Awareness), taqwa (awareness of God), and an empathetic understanding of others' situations creates a cultural atmosphere where emotional resonance is not only socially acceptable but also spiritually esteemed (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015). Consequently, Western neuroticism scales, which were developed without considering these cultural elements, may be assessing a distinct phenomenon in Arab Muslim populations — one that correlates positively with emotional competence rather than negatively. This observation has significant implications for the cross-cultural relevance of the concept of neuroticism. It highlights the necessity for psychological measurement tools that are culturally informed and do not uncritically apply Western models of pathology to non-Western settings.

The negative correlation between openness to experience and overall emotional intelligence, as suggested by H3, challenges prevailing Western beliefs. In Western academic literature, openness—defined by traits such as intellectual curiosity, creativity, and willingness to embrace new experiences—is generally linked positively with emotional insight and adaptability (McCrae, 1994). Conversely, in the educational landscape of the UAE, where there is a strong emphasis on tradition, established hierarchies of knowledge, and cultural norms that dictate emotional expression (Hofstede, 2001; Chao & Tseng, 2002), it seems that emotional competence may be cultivated more effectively through adherence to culturally defined relational behaviors rather than through individualistic pursuits of emotional exploration. Therefore, in collectivist environments like this one, emotional intelligence may be better understood as proficient execution of culturally appropriate emotional scripts rather than the self-directed emotional creativity associated with openness in Western contexts.

The minimal-to-almost-nonexistent correlations found between extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness and the emotional intelligence (EI) dimensions align with hypothesis H4. This suggests that the personality-EI relationships observed in Western studies do not simply transfer to the UAE context. In Western populations, extraversion and agreeableness are consistently identified as positive indicators of social and emotional skills (Saklofske et al., 2003; Schutte et al., 1998). The weaker connections observed in this study may indicate that, within collectivist cultures, social behaviors are largely influenced by cultural norms and role expectations. This influence may diminish the extent to which individual traits like extraversion can predict interpersonal emotional competencies.

These findings carry significant theoretical implications for the field of cross-cultural psychology. They indicate that the relationship between personality and emotional intelligence (EI) is influenced by cultural context rather than being universally applicable. Specifically, it suggests that the collectivism inherent in Arab-Islamic culture creates a distinct pattern of personality-EI interactions that does not merely reflect variations within Western individualistic or East Asian collectivist frameworks. This discovery calls into question the prevailing assumption in much of personality research that constructs such as the Big Five and EI possess

consistent psychological meanings and functional relevance across cultures. It reinforces the argument for creating indigenous psychological models rooted in Arab cultural values and Islamic psychology to accurately represent personality and emotional competence in ways that are ecologically valid for Arab populations (Dwairy, 2006; Cheung et al., 2011). Moreover, these results add to an increasing body of evidence suggesting that samples from WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) societies cannot serve as a universal benchmark for psychological theory (Henrich et al., 2010), highlighting the necessity for cross-cultural replication to become a standard practice within psychological research.

The practical implications of these findings are notably substantial. For higher education institutions in the UAE, grasping the culturally specific relationships between personality and emotional intelligence (EI) highlighted here is directly relevant to the development of student support services and counseling strategies. EI training programs designed within Western frameworks—often focusing on minimizing neuroticism and enhancing openness as means to foster emotional competence—may not align well with the psychological realities faced by Arab student populations. Therefore, EI development initiatives should prioritize fostering interpersonal sensitivity and relational attunement, traits typically observed in high-EI students in this cultural context. This approach should frame emotional competence around themes of collective well-being, relational harmony, and Islamic concepts of Self-Awareness and empathy. Such tailored programs are likely to resonate more effectively with students' inherent values and cultural identities, potentially leading to greater, more durable improvements in their emotional competence. Additionally, for faculty and advisors, a deeper understanding of these culturally specific personality-EI dynamics can facilitate a more accurate interpretation of students' emotional and social behaviors, helping to prevent the misinterpretation of culturally adaptive emotional sensitivity as signs of psychological fragility or instability.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of the present study warrant acknowledgment. The convenience sample drawn from business, marketing, and health sciences programs may not fully represent the breadth of personality profiles across all academic disciplines; future research should include students from engineering, education, and social sciences to provide more comprehensive coverage. The cross-sectional design precludes causal or developmental interpretations, and longitudinal studies examining personality stability and EI development across university years would strengthen understanding of these constructs in UAE contexts. Objective 4 is addressed through comparison with published Western findings rather than a concurrently recruited Western sample, which limits conclusions to pattern-level observation rather than direct statistical group comparison.

The reliance on self-report measures introduces potential social desirability bias, particularly for EI, where cultural norms may systematically influence response patterns. Multi-method approaches incorporating behavioral observations, peer ratings, and performance-based EI assessments would enhance validity. Critically, the study did not distinguish between

Emirati and non-Emirati participants in detailed analyses; given the UAE's demographically diverse expatriate-majority population, future research should explicitly examine whether cultural background moderates personality-EI relationships within this sample.

The unexpected neuroticism-EI positive correlation represents perhaps the most important direction for future research. Replication across diverse Arab samples using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies is needed to establish robustness and clarify the psychological mechanisms underlying this relationship. In-depth interviews exploring how UAE students conceptualize emotional awareness and regulation could illuminate whether current Western measures adequately capture these constructs in Arab contexts. The development of culturally grounded EI frameworks incorporating Islamic concepts of emotional awareness, muraqaba, and empathic responsibility represents a significant and overdue research priority. Finally, future research should examine whether personality-EI patterns generalize to working adults and community samples, and investigate the applied implications for leadership effectiveness, organizational citizenship, and workplace well-being in UAE professional contexts.

CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this research are exploratory in nature as they aim to gain insight into the correlation between the personality trait profiles and emotional intelligence among students at a university in the UAE. Abu Dhabi University's student body encompasses over 56 nationalities (Abu Dhabi University, 2024), reflecting the broader multicultural composition of the UAE itself and lending the sample greater demographic diversity than a single-nationality convenience sample would afford; nonetheless, findings are bounded to this institutional context and should be read as empirically grounded preliminary evidence that motivates, rather than resolves, broader cross-cultural inquiry into personality–EI relationships across the Arab region. The results however show theoretically interesting patterns, such as the positive relationship between neuroticism and emotional intelligence, which is not typical in western literature, indicating that perhaps some of the personality–EI models in the literature do not necessarily apply in all cultures; and that some collectivist Arab-Islamic concepts might give different functional meaning to the same personality traits that are considered to be maladaptive in western literature. These patterns are thus not presented as irrefutable causal explanations, but rather as hypotheses along the lines of the theories of cross-cultural psychology (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995) and are being offered for the purposes of systematic replication in various institutions, emirates, and Arab national contexts. Most fundamentally, these findings reveal the importance of culturally validating psychological tools and creating alternative psychological models that recognize the importance of local meaning-generating systems without blindly transplanting models of emotional competence from western cultures to non-western cultures. Empirical research in under-researched areas like the

UAE is crucial for the growth of psychology toward a true cultural inclusiveness and important to the development of truly global psychological science.

A: Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

B: Clinical trial number: not applicable.

C: Ethical approval statement

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Abu Dhabi University (Approval Number CAS–0000055; Date: 09/2/2025). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits of the research, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

D: Consent to Publish

All participants provided informed consent regarding publishing their anonymized data. No identifying information is included in this manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

E: Author Contributions

Dr. Smitha Dev conceived and designed the study, analyzed the data and interpreted the results Mr. Shibu conducted the data collection and drafted and revised the manuscript.

F. Data availability

The datasets analyzed in the study are not publicly released and are available only from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX

Table 3.

Comparison of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience by Gender, Nationality, and Academic Discipline

		Mean	SD	N	Test statistics		p
Gender	Male	31.6	5.0	67	T	1.13	0.260
	Female	32.4	4.6	133			
Nationality	UAE	32.3	4.8	96	T	0.33	0.741
	Others	32.0	4.7	104			
Subject of study	Accounting	33.1	2.9	22	F	1.07	0.378
	BBA	32.7	5.1	51			
	Digital Marketing	31.8	5.3	26			
	Finance and fintech	31.2	5.8	39			
	Human Nutrition & Dietetics	33.0	4.0	28			
	Others	31.2	3.9	34			

Comparison of **Conscientiousness** of university students in the United Arab Emirates based on their background

		Mean	SD	N	Test statistics		p
Gender	Male	32.4	4.5	67	T	0.77	0.440
	Female	32.9	4.5	133			
Nationality	UAE	32.3	4.5	96	T	1.21	0.226
	Others	33.1	4.5	104			
Subject of study	Accounting	34.5	3.4	22	F	1.94	0.090
	BBA	33.4	4.9	51			
	Digital Marketing	32.6	4.9	26			
	Finance and fintech	31.3	5.1	39			
	Human Nutrition & Dietetics	33.0	2.3	28			
	Others	32.1	4.4	34			

Comparison of **Neuroticism** of university students in the United Arab Emirates based on their background

		Mean	SD	N	Test statistics		p
Gender	Male	28.3	7.7	67	T	0.1	0.924
	Female	28.4	7.4	133			
Nationality	UAE	28.7	7.3	96	T	0.65	0.519
	Others	28.1	7.6	104			
Subject of study	Accounting	27.6	8.4	22	F	1.7	0.137
	BBA	26.2	8.4	51			
	Digital Marketing	29.5	6.8	26			
	Finance and fintech	28.7	6.4	39			
	Human Nutrition & Dietetics	28.8	8.0	28			
	Others	30.6	5.9	34			

Comparison of **Openness** to Experience of university students in the United Arab Emirates based on their background

		Mean	SD	N	Test statistics		p
Gender	Male	31.5	4.2	67	T	0.12	0.901
	Female	31.4	4.3	133			
Nationality	UAE	31.6	4.4	96	T	0.48	0.635
	Others	31.3	4.1	104			
Subject of study	Accounting	30.9	3.8	22	F	2.54*	0.030
	BBA	31.3	4.1	51			
	Digital Marketing	31.0	4.5	26			
	Finance and fintech	31.3	4.6	39			
	Human Nutrition & Dietetics	33.9	3.6	28			
	Others	30.4	3.9	34			

*: - Significant at 0.05 l level