Journal of Culture and Values in Education

https://cultureandvalues.org

E-ISSN: 2590-342X

Volume: 9 Issue: 1 2026

pp.249-268

Emotional Intelligence and Problem-Solving Correlations and Impact on Employability: A Case Study from the UAE

Ganka Ivanova[*a] & Rakan Alhrhasheh[b]

* Corresponding author:
Email: ganka.ivanova@zu.ac.ae
a. College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, UAE.
b. Al Ain University, College of Education, Social Sciences and Humanities, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Article Info
Received: October 19, 2025
Accepted: February 22, 2026
Published: March 7, 2026

10.46303/jcve.2026.11

How to cite
Ivanova, G., & Alhrhasheh, R. (2026). Emotional Intelligence and Problem-Solving Correlations and Impact on Employability: A Case Study from the UAE. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 9(1), 249-268. https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2026.11

ABSTRACT
In this study, we aim to address questions about how UAE Leadership Development Plans and Employability connect with current students in UAE classrooms by evaluating the correlation between the employability of UAE university students and their emotional intelligence (EI) and problem-solving skills. Moreover, we cover what must be considered in the curricula of UAE Universities to prepare future leaders to lead the workforce. To that end, we employed an employability test developed by AQR International UK and collected data from 310 undergraduate students aged 17 to 55. Both EI and problem-solving skills were strongly positively correlated with employability ($p < .001$). Even though male participants scored higher than female participants for EI and problem-solving skills, analysis of variance revealed nonsignificant gender differences ($p > .05$ for these variables. Our study underscored the critical role of EI and problem-solving skills in facilitating leadership potential among university students. These insights are particularly instrumental in informing the higher education curriculum and in assessing employability and leadership potential.

KEYWORDS
Employability; personality factors; emotional intelligence; problem-solving leadership.

INTRODUCTION

In the UAE, a modern, newly built country with global outreach, the government devotes considerable attention and coordinated effort to Youth Development Programs and the growth of leadership potential. This ambition involves preparing and shaping future world leaders who are ready to adapt to the challenges of tomorrow and support the Global Goals and agenda encompassing the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (UAE Government platform, 2025). Educational programs reflect these ambitious intentions while combining state-of-the-art technology with a finely-tailored Leadership Competencies Framework (Abdallahet al., 2025). Notable progress has been made to incorporate women from society and the community into the workforce, and many social contribution initiatives, led by female ministers, promote a vision of gender equality and inclusion. The role of soft skills, personality traits, and Emotional intelligence (EI) has received unprecedented attention. Extensive research has focused on defining and measuring EI's components. However, the EI concept has remained without a clear and consensual definition. Even though early studies assessed EI as arising from the emotional experiences of individuals or groups, current research has conceptualized EI in terms of personality traits and competencies (Odame & Pandey, 2025). Today, EI encompasses the ability to understand, regulate, and utilize emotions, both personally and in relation to others, to address social and professional issues effectively. Hence, it involves acknowledging one's own emotions, interpreting others' emotions, and implementing this understanding to direct actions and decisions. (Kgosiemang & Khoza, 2022; Pretorius & Plaatjies, 2023) Psychological research has further examined the interaction between emotions and cognitive functions, including decision-making and problem-solving. Thus, it reveals a strong association between decision-making processes and the brain regions tasked with emotional regulation (Almotrefi, 2025; Dev et al., 2025a; 2025b).

Problem-solving involves identifying, analyzing, and resolving issues to attain desired outcomes. Defining the issue, assessing possible solutions, and implementing the most appropriate strategy are the three primary steps of effective problem-solving Childress & Geoff, 2017). Alongside EI, problem-solving skills are highly valued in professional and organizational contexts. Research has systematically demonstrated a strong link between EI and effective problem-solving. EI facilitates emotional stability, improves constructive interpersonal interactions, and boosts personal development. It enhances individuals' ability to establish goals, face obstacles, and succeed in diverse settings (Adigwe, 2015; Korkmaz et al., 2020).

In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement (Kilinc & Tarman, 2022), in a country like the UAE, where a global workforce is well-established, the skills required to navigate modern life are evolving faster than ever before. Alongside digital literacy, the demand for soft skills—specifically EI—has become increasingly pivotal (Dev et al., 2025a; 2025b). This condition is especially applicable to emerging economies, where integrating the local workforce into a globalized labor market poses notable challenges (Deniz, 2013). Multiple models have been developed to conceptualize EI, each underscoring specific attributes. In one of the most

widely adopted models, scholars identify four foundational dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Harvard, 2009).

Through social learning or formal training, many EI competencies, such as empathy and self-control, can be acquired. Higher EI is characterized by more advanced competencies, such as conflict management and teamwork (Kanesan & Fauzan, 2019; Yalın & Sözen, 2015). Moreover, EI enables people to perceive and understand others' emotions and to apply that awareness to attain specific goals—for example, a nurse interpreting a patient's emotional state to deliver suitable care. EI is instrumental in managing a broad spectrum of complex issues, rendering it a beneficial resource for collaborative problem solving and conflict resolution (Başoğul & Özgür, 2016; Beyazıt et al., 2023; Oyenuga, 2024).

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the government emphasizes nurturing leadership within the Emirati population, prioritizing ongoing upskilling to enable Emiratis to participate in and lead in the global arena (Areepattamannil, 2024). From early socialization onward, leadership development is shaped by family dynamics, cultural expectations, and an educational system designed to nurture key personality traits aligned with national goals. Increasingly, leadership development initiatives involve empowering women to assume prominent roles in society (Hassan Al Marzouqi & Forster, 2011).

Furthermore, applying a strength-based approach to leadership nurtures the spirit of ongoing growth and development (Breevaart et al., 2025). Even though EI has been widely explored in various global contexts, not much research has specifically addressed its relationship with problem-solving, especially in Emirati society and among university students in the UAE. Existing studies have centered primarily on the link between EI and academic achievement or employability and reduced stress (Avunduk, 2021), leaving a substantial gap in understanding how EI correlates with problem-solving skills within the unique social and cultural context of Emirati higher education and society. Given the UAE government's strategic emphasis on youth empowerment and leadership development, in this study, we investigate the role of EI in improving problem-solving skills and employability, both of which are timely and essential issues. Even though most previous studies have predominantly employed qualitative methods, such as structured interviews, we adopt a descriptive quantitative approach in this study, using a questionnaire survey. Hence, we aim to provide broader insights into and a fresh perspective on the nature of the relationship between EI and problem-solving skills.

In this study, we explore the current status of employability and leadership development among university students in the UAE, emphasizing EI and problem-solving skills as key indicators. Insights from the study's findings should facilitate the development of targeted social policies to help prepare Emirati youth for effective participation and leadership on local, regional, and global stages. Furthermore, we wish to examine whether gender correlations with EI are significant, as this is pivotal to increasing female participation in the UAE, including the appointment of female leaders in key positions in the future of the UAE. Additionally, the workforce in the UAE in the past decade has been welcoming increased number of female

employees, and the latter has been endorsed by the UAE Government Leadership itself. By investigating the correlations among EI, Problem Solving, and Employability, we offer a fresh perspective in this study.

Problem-Solving

Regarding problem-solving skills, they must help professionals improve operational processes and thereby achieve the desired results. The first step involves defining the problem at hand by specifying the issues, including their scope and impact, and understanding what must be accomplished. By analyzing the problem's root cause, one can understand the factors that drive it (Andrews & Aydin, 2020). Once equipped with the necessary insight, the professional can articulate possible solutions by drawing on creative thinking and integrating ideas from diverse perspectives. The next step encompasses implementing the chosen solution and monitoring its outcomes, making adjustments as needed to facilitate the effectiveness of the targeted process. Therefore, being learnable and improvable, critical thinking, effective communication, adaptability, collaboration, and creativity comprise all key problem-solving skills (Jordan & Troth, 2021).

Visone (2018) investigated the development of problem-solving skills among teachers at a public university—aspiring educational leaders—during summer teaching programs that integrated realistic scenarios. Data were gathered through interviews and a survey addressing perceived problem-solving skills. The findings revealed a notable improvement in participants' theoretical problem-solving skills, but not in their capacity to navigate real-world challenges effectively. Participants recognized the value of learning from both peers and instructors, articulating the need for ongoing support and practical experience to reinforce their problem-solving skills. Similarly, Tekeli (2010) reported that university students effectively addressed challenges by using various strategies that improved their problem-solving skills. Nevertheless, limited studies in the UAE have investigated this issue. Accordingly, our study will uniquely contribute to problem-solving issues by expanding on the relevant literature. In addition to problem-solving, we investigate emotional intelligence and employability, and examine the correlation coefficient among these three variables.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotions influence how people respond to situations, rendering efficient use and management of emotions a valuable competence. EI encompasses key skills in social situations: self-awareness to acknowledge one's thoughts, feelings, and reactions (Kargeti, 2023); self-regulation to handle one's own emotions and impulses; awareness and empathy to appreciate others' feelings and perspectives (Alzoubi & Aziz, 2021; Filice & Weese, 2024). A key component involves effective skills and can facilitate academic achievement (Iswinarti & Hasanati 2020). Professionals can employ EI to reflect on and derive insight from their previous actions and implement any requisite improvements (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).

Emotional Intelligence, Problem-Solving, and Employability

Studies have demonstrated that higher EI helps an individual tackle problems. One plausible

mechanism involves increased awareness and regulation of emotions, especially in a professional setting. Individuals with higher EI can better acknowledge their emotions and control their reactions (Ahad et al., 2021; Modna et al., 2023), which helps prevent irrational and impulsive decision-making during the problem-solving process. Additionally, empathy and social skills encourage cooperation within a team, fostering conflict resolution and communication among individuals who must collaborate to solve problems. Thanks to the self-motivation and persistence associated with higher EI, these professionals can overcome obstacles and retain focus during the problem-solving phase (Bru-Luna et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies have indicated that fostering stress management enables EI to help professionals develop more thoughtful solutions. Combining self-awareness, empathy, and self-regulation can help a professional make the most effective problem-solving decisions (Estrada et al., 2021). We also aim to determine correlations among emotional intelligence, problem solving, leadership, and gender in this study. The pressure to perform, actively participate in UAE social life, and proactively shape the future has risen among Emirati women. Women in the workforce are typically expected to exhibit more assertiveness than male managers (Schlamp et al., 2025).

Problem-solving also facilitates EI: By navigating the challenges of problem-solving, an individual's self-awareness of positive and negative emotions improves, helping them structure their reactions in various social situations. Hence, by engaging in problem-solving tasks, especially as part of a team, professionals develop empathy and the ability to facilitate effective collaboration and communication. Within organizations, leaders with higher EI can guide their teams in complex situations, foster collaboration, and establish a positive working environment. This approach is pivotal for addressing problems that require diverse opinions and skills and is critical in countries such as the UAE, where we witness unprecedented ambition for the equal inclusion of male and female leaders in government's key positions. For aspiring leaders, education can be instrumental in developing EI competencies and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, understanding and managing one's emotions can facilitate critical personal growth and improvement opportunities (Atrizka & Pratama, 2022). Even though EI is considered comparatively stable, individuals with increased awareness of their emotional capacities and personal characteristics can engage more effectively in social interactions. Altogether, EI can be advanced and reinforced over time via deliberate learning and experience.

Questions and Hypotheses

To better understand the correlations among EI, problem-solving skills, and employability among students in the UAE, we seek to address the following research questions:

Questions

RQ1. What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and employability among university students in the United Arab Emirates?

RQ2. What is the relationship between problem-solving skills and employability among university students in the United Arab Emirates?

RQ3. To what extent do emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills jointly predict

employability among university students in the United Arab Emirates?

Hypotheses

H1. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and employability among university students.

H2. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between problem-solving skills and employability among university students.

H3. Emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills significantly predict employability among university students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

We used a descriptive survey method to identify intergroup differences and relationships among latent psychological variables, including EI, problem-solving, and employability. The design enables us to test the hypothesis and reinforce the generalizability of the results to a similar educational setting (Almusaed et al., 2025; Nardi, 2028).

We chose a descriptive quantitative technique owing to its objective quantification of the Emotional Intelligence (EI) and problem-solving competencies. It enabled us to conduct gender-based comparisons and identify statistically significant associations among variables in a large student population (Duckett, 2021; Ghanad, 2023).

Study Sample

The sample comprised of 310 undergraduate students (172 males and 138 females). One of the sampling techniques used was cluster sampling where intact undergraduate classes in various faculties were selected. The ages of the participants were between 17 and 55 years. The difference in the age indicates the enrollments diversity in higher education, in which students can start or rejoin their studies at different ages of life because of personal, professional, or social factors.

Table 1.

Distribution of the Study Sample by Gender and Age

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)
Gender	Male	172	55.5	55.5
	Female	138	44.5	44.5
	Total	**310**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Age (years)	17–25	186	60.0	60.0
	26–35	84	27.1	27.1
	36–45	28	9.0	9.1
	46–55	12	3.9	3.9
	Total	**310**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Data collection tools

The employability test, developed by AQR International (UK) and initially formulated to

determine emotional intelligence, problem-solving aptitude, and employability competencies, was used in the study. By acknowledging that the antecedent scale is appropriate for a broad range of graduates and employees, we meticulously adjusted it to better appeal to undergraduates in the UAE context. This adjustment involved selectively retaining items explicitly associated with our research variables and making appropriate wording changes to ensure that the cohort resembled a university cohort.

The psychometric assessment test, which is a questionnaire comprised thirty items that were categorized into three parts: (1) Emotional Intelligence (10 items), (2) Problem-Solving Skills (10 items), and (3) Employability-related Dispositions (10 items). The responses were evaluated for each item using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the subscales, and all three domains yielded coefficients ranging from .821 to .931, indicating strong reliability. Table 2 depicts the reliability summary of the questionnaire with high reliability values. Table 2 illustrates the scale's reliability and validity results.

Table 2.

The Cronbach's Alpha for the Reliability of the Questionnaire

Domain	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Face Validity
Problem Solving	10	.871	.931
Emotional Intelligence	10	.821	.850
Employment Readiness	10	.931	.932
Total Scale	**30**	**.921**	**.954**

Data Collection

We collected the data by distributing the online questionnaire over three weeks in February 2025. The questionnaire was emailed to 400 randomly selected students. A total of 322 questionnaires were returned, of which 12 were discarded as incomplete. The final sample included 310 questionnaires, which were considered adequate and representative of the research population. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that their identities would remain anonymous.

Ethical Considerations*:* We adhered to all institutional and national ethical standards throughout the study. All participants were informed of their consent and that their participation was voluntary. No personal data were gathered, ensuring confidentiality throughout the study and beyond.

Data Analysis

SPSS (Version 26) was used to analyze the data to address the research questions and test the three hypotheses. Descriptive statistics involved presenting the mean values and the standard deviations of all the questionnaire items. Furthermore, we reported general mean scores for emotional intelligence (EI) and problem-solving skills for men and women. The independent-

samples t-test was used to establish whether any statistically significant gender differences existed among these variables. Additionally, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the direction and strength of the relationships among EI, problem-solving skills, and employability. The level of statistical significance was set at .05.

The assumptions of parametric testing were tested before hypothesis testing. Given the large sample size, the normality assumption was considered acceptable based on the Central Limit Theorem. Homogeneity of variance and linearity were also assessed and found to be satisfied, justifying the use of parametric analyses.

RESULTS

First, we provide an overview of central tendency and variability and present the mean scores and standard deviations for constructs such as emotional intelligence, problem-solving aptitude, and employability.

These descriptive statistics yield an approximate sketch of the distributional properties and general trends of the data.

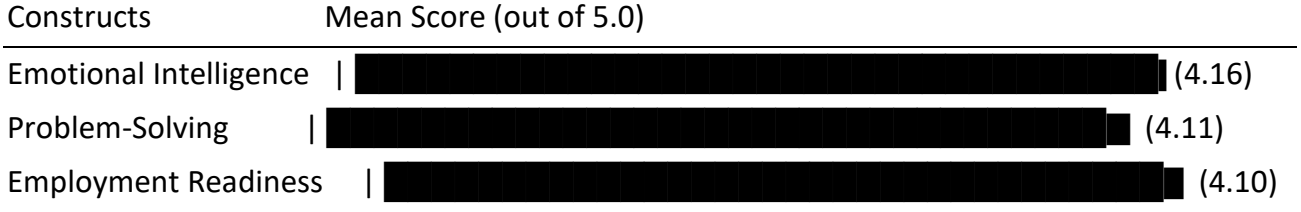
The following analysis outlines inferential procedures, namely, the Levene test for homogeneity of variances and independent t-tests to address gender-specific differences in emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills. Once these tests have been completed, Pearson correlation tests are conducted to evaluate whether emotional intelligence, problem-solving ability, and employability are correlated as hypothesized. Altogether, these stringent steps provide a solid basis for testing the study's hypotheses.

Descriptive Results (Preliminary Analysis)

In this section, the descriptive statistics of the key variables of the study, such as emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and employability, will be provided. These outcomes give a summary of the properties of the sample used in the study and can be taken as a precursor before the correlational and predictive analysis. See the bellow figure.

Figure 1.

Overall mean scores for the main study constructs (Emotional Intelligence, Problem-Solving, and Employment Readiness).



The scores in the figure 1 shows a high mean at the general levels of all the constructs with the highest mean of 4.16 being recorded in Emotional Intelligence. Problem-Solving (M = 4.11) and Employment Readiness (M = 4.10) immediately come in second and third rank, which means that the UAE sample is well-grounded in employability skills.

Emotional Intelligence

The descriptive examination shows that university students indicated moderate and high emotional intelligence. Table 3 shows the mean scores and the standard deviations of each dimension.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to manage both your own emotions and understand the emotions of people around you. There are five key elements to EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

(1) Emotional Intelligence (10 items), (2) Problem-Solving Skills (10 items), and (3) Employability-related Dispositions (10 items).

Table 3.

The Responses of the Study Sample Individuals to the Factor of Emotional Intelligence

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. I find it beneficial to ask questions and learn from those around me.	4.40	0.84
2. I get satisfaction out of helping others.	4.40	0.82
3. I usually know when I upset someone.	4.30	0.85
4. I am a good listener.	4.30	0.83
5. I always tend to be aware of how other people feel.	4.20	0.89
6. I take care to listen to other views and ideas.	4.20	0.89
7. When working with others, I often notice how they could work better.	4.10	1.02
8. I am aware of my own emotions.	4.00	0.93
9. I often try to see things from other people's points of view.	3.90	0.98
10. I often get my own way in groups.	3.80	1.04

Table 3 illustrates the mean value for each item measuring EI. The statements "I find it beneficial to ask questions and learn from those around me" and "I get satisfaction out of helping others" had the highest mean (*Mean* = 4.4). The statements "I usually know when I have upset someone" and "I am a good listener" followed (*Mean* = 4.3). The statements "I always tend to be aware of how other people feel" and "I take care to listen to other views and ideas" had the third highest mean (*Mean* = 4.2). The statement "When working with others, I often notice how they could work better" had the fourth highest (*Mean* = 4.1), whereas the statement "I am aware of my own emotions" scored fifth highest (*Mean* = 4.0). The statement "I often try to see things from other people's points of view" had the sixth-highest mean (*M*= 3.9). Finally, the lowest-scoring statement was "I often get my own way in groups" (*Mean* = 3.8).

Problem-Solving Skills

Findings indicate that the students portrayed acceptable problem-solving abilities. Table 4 provides detailed descriptive statistics.

Problem solving: Transforming ability, answering ability, interpreting ability, verifying ability

(1) Emotional Intelligence (10 items), (2) Problem-Solving Skills (10 items), and (3) Employability-related Dispositions (10 items).

Table 4.

The Responses of the Study Sample Individuals to the Factors Driving the Problem-Solving

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Problem-solving allows me to exercise my mind.	4.40	0.80
I prefer to solve a problem myself rather than give it to someone else.	4.30	0.84
When I see a problem, I immediately think of solutions.	4.30	0.96
I enjoy finding solutions to difficult problems.	4.20	0.92
My friends will often come to me for advice if they need it.	4.10	0.92
I usually deal with most problems I come across.	4.10	1.07
I always try to meet deadlines.	4.00	1.01
I can always work out how to deal with a problem.	4.00	1.04
I enjoy solving puzzles.	3.90	1.03
I engage in voluntary work helping others.	3.80	1.13

Table 4 presents the mean values for the problem-solving items. The statement "Problem- solving allows me to exercise my brain" had the highest mean (*Mean* = 4.4). Then, both statements "I prefer to solve a problem myself than give it to someone else" and "When I see a problem, I immediately think of solutions" had the second-highest mean (*Mean* = 4.3). The statement "I enjoy finding solutions to difficult problems" followed suit (*Mean* = 4.2). The lowest mean occurred for "I engage in voluntary work helping others" (*Mean* = 1.56).

Employability

The results indicate that overall students considered themselves as moderately to highly ready to work. The table 5 provides the summary of the corresponding descriptive statistics.

Table 5.

The Responses of the Study Sample Individuals to the Factor of Employment Readiness

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
I keep all of my work organized in files.	4.10	0.94
I like being responsible for something.	4.30	0.92
I work hard to do well.	4.10	0.97
I understand how important it is to keep up to date.	3.90	1.07
I prefer to stick to the rules.	4.40	0.77
I am often described as an "ideas" person.	3.90	0.97
I generally plan what I am going to do.	4.20	0.93
People generally trust me for advice and support.	4.10	0.93
I can influence others when they see things differently from me.	4.10	0.96
I can see myself being successful in the future.	3.90	0.96

Table 5 presents the mean employability score. The item "I prefer to stick to the rules" had the highest mean (*Mean* = 4.4), followed by "I like being responsible for something" (*Mean* = 4.3). The lowest-scoring items were "I am often described as an 'ideas' person," "I understand

how important it is to keep up to date," and "I can see myself being successful in the future" (*Mean* = 3.9).

Correlational Results

The conditions for parametric statistical inference were thoroughly verified before conducting empirical tests. Specifically, we tested the assumptions of homogeneity of variance, linearity, and normality to determine the suitability of the inference processes. The diagnostic results satisfactorily verified all the necessary assumptions. Hence, the parametric tests were used in the subsequent
analyses (Table 6).

Table 6.

Results Associated with Parametric Assumption Tests

Assumption	Test/Method	Result
Normality	Central Limit Theorem (n > 30)	Assumption met
Homogeneity of variance	Levene's Test	Assumption met
Linearity	Scatterplot inspection	Assumption met

In this section, the statistical tests conducted to test the three hypotheses in this research are outlined. Using Levene's test of homogeneity of variances and independent-samples t-tests, we conducted parametric tests of gender differences in emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills. Moreover, we calculated Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to determine the associations among emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and future employability.

Results of H1. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and employability among university students.

Pearson correlation analysis was done to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and employability.

Table 7.

Pearson Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Employability

Variables	Employability
Emotional Intelligence	r = 0.62**

These findings in the table 7 indicated that there was a positive and statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and employability (r = 0.62, p <.001). This means that the greater the emotional intelligence, the greater the employability readiness between university students.

Results of H2. There is a statistically significant positive correlation between problem-solving skills and employability among university students.

In order to test this theory, a correlation coefficient was tested by applying Pearson

correlation to establish the relationship of problem-solving skills employability.

Table 8.

Pearson Correlation between Problem-Solving Skills and Employability

Variables	Employability
Problem-Solving Skills	r = 0.56**

Table 8 presents a positive and statistically significant correlation between problem-solving skills and employability (r = 0.56, p <.001), which is that students with more problem-solving skills are more likely to report higher employability readiness.

Results of H_3: Emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills significantly predict employability among university students.

We built hypothesis 3 to explore which problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence were positively associated with employability.

Table 9.

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Emotional Intelligence, Problem-Solving Skills, and Employability

Variables	EI_MEAN	PS_MEAN	Employability
EI_MEAN	1		
PS_MEAN	.74**	1	
Employability	.74**	.77**	1
N	310	310	310

****p<0.05**

Table 9 illustrates the correlation coefficients among emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and employability. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills were positively correlated and statistically significant (r = .744, p < .001), suggesting that students with a higher emotional intelligence were better able to solve problems.

The same high positive correlation was also observed between emotional intelligence and employability (r=.737, p <.001), suggesting that students with greater emotional intelligence had greater employability and leadership potential. Additionally, problem-solving skills were found to be highly and significantly correlated with the employability (r = .767, p < .001). All these findings suggest that both emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills significantly predict students' employability.

Hypothesis H3 was completely substantiated. The findings demonstrated that significant positive relationships at the .001 level or lower existed among emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and employability. These results suggest that increased employment and future leadership potential are correlated with higher levels of emotional intelligence and problem-solving ability.

Supplementary Analysis

Despite the fact that the issue of gender differences was not the main aim of the current study, the independent samples t-tests were provided as an additional study to determine whether there were any differences in emotional intelligence and problem-solving abilities in male and female students. The findings showed that there were no statistically significant differences between males and females on the emotional intelligence, t versus = and problem-solving, t versus =. These results indicate that gender groups are similar in their relationships towards emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and employability.

Table 10.

Descriptive Statistics and t-Test Results for Emotional Intelligence Scores by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P (Sig.)
Male	172	4.22	0.52	1.42	0.16
Female	138	4.13	0.52	1.42	0.16

Table 10 presents the descriptive statistics and t-test results for emotional intelligence scores by gender. The findings reveal that male students did not have higher (t = 1.42, *p* = .16) emotional intelligence (M = 4.22, SD = 0.52) than female students (M = 4.13, SD = 0.52). Hence, no significant difference (*p* = .16) was observed between male and female students in emotional intelligence.

Table 11.

Descriptive Statistics and t-Test Results for Problem-Solving Scores by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Male	172	4.13	0.53	1.33	0.18
Female	138	4.05	0.54	1.33	0.18

Table 11 presents descriptive statistics and t-test results for problem-solving scores by gender. The findings indicate that the mean problem-solving scores among male students (M = 4.13, SD = 0.53) were not significantly (*t* = 1.33, *p* = .18) higher than the mean problem-solving scores among female students (M = 4.05, SD = 0.54). These results reveal no gender differences in problem-solving ability among the study participants (*p* = .18).

DISCUSSION

In this study, we determined the relationship between the employability of university students in the UAE and their emotional intelligence (EI) and problem-solving abilities in the context of leadership. Moreover, we examined gender differences in emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills and explored how such personality characteristics were associated with employability. Both descriptive and inferential results were helpful in revealing students' cognitive-emotional skills and their consequences for further professional preparation.

This discussion will start by discussing the hypothesis-testing results and then this will be followed by theoretical interpretation of the results.

Correlational Results

The outcome of H1 suggested that there was statistically significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and employability preparedness. The more the students had higher emotional intelligence scores, the more they were likely to report high employability readiness.

In the same manner, H2 showed that problem-solving skills and employability readiness were positively correlated with a significant level of statistical significance. Greater problem-solving skills were also noted to be associated with higher employability readiness by students who showed greater abilities to solve problems.

Moreover, the H3 hypothesis proved that emotional intelligence is strongly positively correlated with problem-solving skills. The correlation coefficients were all greater than.70 and were statistically significant ($p<.001$) so they showed that there were strong correlations between the three variables.

The results imply that there is a close relationship between the problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence and employability readiness of university students in the UAE. These relationships however should be viewed as associations and not causal effects considering that the study design is correlational.

These findings correlate with existent literature pointing to the fact that emotional intelligence is correlated with job-related competencies of communication, teamwork, adaptability, and decision-making (Joshi, 2025; Lion et al., 2025; Singh et al., 2024; Yuldasheva, 2024). Similarly, the high correlation between problem-solving abilities and employability is justified by studies, which place a main focus on problem-solving as the main element of labor-market readiness in the economy of knowledge (Koe, 2022; Halwasiya et al., 2023).

Theoretically, these results can be explained in the context of Social Capital Theory that focuses on the importance of interpersonal relations, trust, mutual norms, and connection resources in determining the opportunity and professional performance of individuals. Students of greater emotional intelligence have more chances to form positive social contacts, work in groups, and create positive support networks. On the same note, good skills in problem solving can develop a perception of competence in the social and professional arena. All these features are linked to increased access to informational and relational resources, which are connected to employability readiness.

Therefore, the result corroborates the applicability of the Social Capital Theory in the explanation of the relationships between psychological capabilities and professional preparedness among the students of universities. Social sciences will become more and more important in the future (Tarman,2017).

Synthesis of Findings

The high novelty of the current study is the fact that it presents a combined empirical model of

the direct association of emotional intelligence and problem-solving with employability in the particular setting of Abu Dhabi.

Altogether, the findings indicate that the quality of students' emotional and cognitive skills in Abu Dhabi is a major predictor of employability, whereas demographic variables such as gender are not. Emotional intelligence and problem-solving are complementary skills that determine the students' capacity to communicate effectively, manage relationships, tackle complex problems, and build supportive networks.

All these steps are key aspects of social capital that translate into greater employability and leadership capabilities.

These results have notable implications for institutions of higher learning, suggesting that programs to improve students' socio-emotional and cognitive competencies can substantially enhance their preparedness to enter the labor market. Accordingly, universities should focus on integrating emotional intelligence, collaborative problem-solving, and leadership development into broader employability frameworks and incorporating these skills into academic curricula. Furthermore, career counseling services can offer workshops to develop emotional regulation skills; professors can incorporate more collaborative, experiential learning activities to improve emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and leadership skills. This approach would help prepare more students for the global market environment that the future workforce could demand.

As one major implication, higher education institutions need to go beyond generic workshops and bypass the inclusion of socio-emotional measurements and problem-solving simulations into the academic testing and post-graduation mandates.

Our results underscore the importance of emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills for students' preparedness to adapt to the changing nature of the modern working environment. Educational practitioners can develop applied projects, simulations, and group tasks to help develop these competencies in the learning environment (Ivygina et al 2019). Developing such strengths can positively impact the students' adaptability, resilience, and leadership potential. For institutions, investing in socio-emotional and cognitive training can yield a more competitive workforce better suited to professional work.

Conclusion

While acknowledging that problem-solving skills are pivotal in professional roles, and EI fosters effective navigation of social situations and emotional control, we explored correlations between these variables and employability in a sample of graduate students. This approach is critical to countries such as the UAE, which has invested substantial effort in shaping the Global leaders of tomorrow. Our study's findings will help educators better understand how EI and problem-solving skills are associated and how they can be integrated in professional settings to optimize career success for current students who are prospective leaders. Our study has demonstrated the need for a strong focus on developing and evaluating EI and problem-solving skills as part of the higher education curriculum, especially in the study's last years. Addressing this need will benefit the local economy and support the Ministry of Human Resources and

Emiratization's goal of developing future leaders in the knowledge-based economy.

Like other UAE studies in the field, we encountered notable challenges, including the limited availability of prior research within Emirati society or cultural comparable contexts. Even though we collected valuable quantitative data through this study's descriptive approach and survey design, more nuanced and detailed insights could be produced using qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups. Accordingly, we recommend that future research be conducted within diverse organizational settings where university graduates are employed to assess their practical problem-solving skills and the real-world application of EI more effectively. The latter may better support the need to reassess the educational curriculum, which must be aligned with industry needs and future demands imposed by a fast-changing society in the context of Globalization. It especially underscores the importance of social studies in our current times and future (Tarman, 2005).

Limitations and Implications

Our study is not without limitations. The application of a descriptive survey design and self-reported instruments can diminish analytical depth and introduce response bias. Conversely, the absence of qualitative approaches will prevent us from observing participants' in-depth experiences. We suggest that future studies employ mixed-methods or qualitative research in other organizational settings to provide more compelling data on emotional intelligence and problem-solving abilities. Our findings highlight the centrality of emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills to employability and leadership development among university students. The findings suggest that higher education institutions should integrate emotionally intelligence training and problem-solving experiences in their curricula to enhance students' readiness for the labor market.

Our research provides empirical evidence at the policy level to support initiatives that align educational outcomes with labor-force requirements, thereby nurturing the development of a skilled and flexible future labor force in the UAE.

REFERENCES

Adigwe, J. C. (2015). Emotional intelligence and problem-solving achievement of chemistry students. *ATBU Journal of Science. Journal of Technology Education*, *3*(1), 80–95. doi:10.70729/IJSER15411

Ahad, R., Mustafa, M. Z., Mohamad, S., Saadah Abdullah, N. H. S., & Nordin, M. N. (2021). Work attitude, organizational commitment and emotional intelligence of Malaysian vocational college teachers. *Journal of Technical Education and Training*, *13*(1), 15–21. doi:10.30880/jtet.2021.13.01.002

Almotrefi, N. (2025). Emotional regulation and its relationship with decision making ability among University Female students in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Educational Sciences and Humanities Studies*, 46 DOI: https://doi.org/10.55074/hesj.vi46.1414

Almusaed, A., Almssad, A., & Yitmen, I. (2025). Survey Research and Sampling Techniques. In Practice of Research Methodology in Civil Engineering and Architecture: A Comprehensive Guide (pp. 561-593). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-97393-2_17

Alzoubi, H. M., & Aziz, R. (2021). Does emotional intelligence contribute to quality of strategic decisions? The mediating role of open innovation. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, *7*(2), 130. doi:10.3390/joitmc7020130

Andrews K., Aydin H. (2020). Pre-service teachers' perceptions of global citizenship education in the social studies curriculum. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 11*(4), pp. 84 – 113. https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/2514/475

Areepattamannil, S. (2024). Building a knowledge economy: Higher education as a catalyst for the United Arab Emirates' visionary growth. *Frontiers in Education, 9*, 1510421. doi:10.3389/feduc.2024.1510421

Abdallah, A. K., Alkaabi, A. M., Qablan, A., & Malakouti, M. (2025). Instructional leadership in the UAE: A systematic review and thematic synthesis. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432251406021

Atrizka, D., & Pratama, I. (2022). The influence of organizational leadership and coaches on Indonesian athletes' adversity quotient (intelligence). *Revista de Psicología del Deporte* [*Journal of Sport Psychology*], *31*(1), 88–97. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ikbar-Pratama/publication/366028628_DINY_-_IKBAR/links/638ec527e42faa7e759b48a7/DINY-IKBAR.pdf

Avunduk, Y. (2021). The Relationship Between the Performance and the Perceived Stress of Employees. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology, 6*(1), 102-112. https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2021.6

Başoğul, C., & Özgür, G. (2016). Role of emotional intelligence in conflict management strategies of nurses. *Asian Nursing Research*, *10*(3), 228–233. doi:10.1016/j.anr.2016.07.002

Beyazıt, U., Yıldız Akkuş, S., & Bütün Ayhan, A. (2023). Predictor Role of Parental Neglect On Socio-Emotional And Moral Development And Behavioral Problems In Children. *Theory and Practice in Child Development, 3(*2), 98–118. https://doi.org/10.46303/tpicd.2023.14

Breevaart, K., van Woerkom, M., Wang, J., & Planken, N. (2025). Strengths-based leadership: A critical review to guide Future research. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 32*(4), 429-448. https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518251342658 (Original work published 2025)

Bru-Luna, L. M., Martí-Vilar, M., Merino-Soto, C., & Cervera-Santiago, J. L. (2021). Emotional intelligence measures: A systematic review. *Healthcare, 9*(12), 1696. doi:10.3390/healthcare9121696

Childress S& Geoff M 2017 A problem-solving Approach to Designing and Implementing a

Strategy to Improve Performance, Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University, A joint initiative of The Hardvard Graduate School of Education and Harvard Business School

Chong. E. K. M. (2023). Innovation in education: Moral education, social cohesion, and culture diplomacy. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education, 6*(1)i-v. https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2023.1

Day, N. E., & Peluchette, J. (2008). Do we practice what we preach? An exploratory study about how business schools manage their human resources. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 15*(3), 275-286. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051808326035 (Original work published 2009)

Deniz, S. (2013). The relationship between emotional intelligence and problem solving skills in prospective teachers. *Educational Research and Reviews*, *8*(24), 2339. https://academicjournals.org/article/article1389783537_Deniz.pdf

Dev, S., Lababidi, D., & Nidawi, I. A.-. (2025a). Developing Culturally-Responsive Emotional Intelligence Programs for UAE Students: Examining Impacts on Self-Motivation, Empathetic Understanding, and Skills. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education, 8*(3), 259-283. https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2025.35

Dev, S., Varghese, M.G., & Rafique, S. (2025b). The Effect of a Classroom-Based Emotional Intelligence Intervention on Students' Self-Regulation and Academic Engagement: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 16*(4), 169-200. https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/6803/758

Duckett, L. J. (2021). Quantitative research excellence: Study design and reliable and valid measurement of variables. Journal of Human Lactation, 37(3), 456-463., L. J. (2021). Quantitative research excellence: Study design and reliable and valid measurement of variables. *Journal of Human Lactation, 37*(3), 456-463. https://doi.org/10.1177/08903344211019

Estrada, M., Monferrer, D., Rodríguez, A., & Moliner, M. Á. (2021). Does emotional intelligence influence academic performance? The role of compassion and engagement in education for sustainable development. *Sustainability*, *13*(4), 1721. doi:10.3390/su13041721

Filice, L., & Weese, W. J. (2024). Developing emotional intelligence. *Encyclopedia*, *4*(1), 583–599. doi:10.3390/encyclopedia4010037

Ghanad, A. (2023). An overview of quantitative research methods. *International journal of multidisciplinary research and analysis, 6*(08), 3794-3803. https://doi.org/10.47191/ijmra/v6-i8-52

Gómez-Leal, R., Holzer, A. A., Bradley, C., Fernández-Berrocal, P., & Patti, J. (2022). The relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership in school leaders: A systematic review. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *52*(1), 1–21. doi:10.1080/0305764X.2021.1927987

Hassan, A.l. Marzouqi, A., & Forster, N. (2011). An exploratory study of the under-representation of Emirate women in the United Arab Emirates' information technology sector *(An international journal)*. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, *30*(7), 544–562. doi:10.1108/02610151111167016

Iswinarti, Jadmiko G.T., & Hasanati N. (2020). Cognitive emotion regulation: Its relationship to parenting stress. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 11*(2), 204 – 222. https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/2261/455

Ivygina A., Pupysheva E., Mukhametshina D. (2019). Formation of sociocultural competence among Foreign students. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 10*(4), 288 – 314. https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/917/418

Jordan, P. J., & Troth, A. C. (2021). Managing emotions during team problem solving: Emotional intelligence and conflict resolution. In N. M. Ashkanasy (Ed.). *Emotion and performance* (pp. 195–218). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press. doi:10.1201/9780429187636-4

Kanesan, P., & Fauzan, N. (2019). Models of emotional intelligence: A review. *e-BANGI Journal*, *16*(7), 1–9.

Kargeti, H. (2023). The role of emotional intelligence in building effective workplace: A quantitative study. *Journal of Cardiovascular Disease Research*, *12*(4), 2558–2565. doi:10.48047/jcdr.2021.12.04.347

Kgosiemang, T., & Khoza, S. (2022). The Effects of Emotional Intelligence on Teachers' Classroom Performance: A Case of Primary Schools in Southeast Region of Botswana. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology, 7*(3), 65-85. https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2022.18

Kilinc, E. & Tarman, B. (2022). Citizenship types, social media use, and speaking foreign language as predictors of global competence, *Citizenship Teaching & Learning, 17*:1, pp. 49–62, https://doi.org/10.1386/ctl_00081_1

Korkmaz, S., Danacı Keleş, D., Kazgan, A., Baykara, S., Gürkan Gürok, M., Feyzi Demir, C., & Atmaca, M. (2020). Emotional intelligence and problem solving skills in individuals who attempted suicide. *Journal of Clinical Neuroscience*, *74*, 120–123. doi:10.1016/j.jocn.2020.02.023

Laundry, L. (2019) Why Emotional Intelligence is important in Relationship. Harvard https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/emotional-intelligence-in-leadership

Modna, Y., Shah, D., & Stanton, S. (2023). Well-being and Burnout among Pre-clinical Medical Students in a Caribbean Medical School. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education, 6*(3), 10-25. https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2023.17

Nardi, P. M. (2018). Doing survey research: A guide to quantitative methods. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315172231

Odame, C., & Pandey, M. (2025). The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management Styles. Sage Open, 15(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440251365507 (Original work published

2025).

Oyenuga, T. (2024). A Book Review of Hulen, T. A., & Lipsett, A.-B. (2022). Building Blocks for Social-Emotional Learning: Creating Safe, Secure, and Successful Elementary Schools. *Research in Educational Policy and Management, 6*(1), 303-307. https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2024.7

Pretorius, A., & Plaatjies, B. (2023). Self-Awareness as a Key Emotional Intelligent Skill for Secondary School Principals' Leadership Toolkit. *Research in Educational Policy and Management, 5*(2), 52-74. https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2023.9

Schlamp, S., Gerpott, F. H., Hentschel, T., Gierke, L. A., & Van Quaquebeke, N. (2025). The challenge of claiming leadership for younger female managers: Exploring differences between employees' behaviors and perceptions. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518251360815

Tarman, B. (2017). Editorial: The future of social sciences. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology, 2*(2). https:/[/doi.org/10.46303/ressat.02.02.ed](doi.org/10.46303/ressat.02.02.ed)

Tekeli, G. (2010). *A comparison between the final year students and university students: Academic ego competence, focus of control, overcoming the stress and problem solving skill* (Master's Thesis): Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences.

United Arab Emirates, Government Platform, 2025, https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/leaving-no-one-behind/8decentworkandeconomicgrowth

Visone, J. D. (2018). The development of problem-solving skills for aspiring educational leaders. *Journal of Leadership Education*, *17*(4), 35–53. doi:10.12806/V17/I4/R3

Yalın, E., & Sözen, İ. (2015). A study of the degrees of emotional intelligence on problem solving skills in the way of Daniel Goleman. *Kastamonu Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, *8*(2), 100–110.