

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF HUE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** Youth is the early period of adulthood and at a high risk of emotional vulnerability that can lead to mental illness. Literature has shown that emotional intelligence (EI) can reduce mental health problems among youth. Evidence has shown that about three million Vietnamese young people are experiencing mental health problems, but only 20% of them received necessary medical assistance and treatment. This study investigates EI among Vietnamese youth to promote effective and practical solutions to improve young people's mental health and emotional capacity in Vietnam. This is a cross-sectional school-based study using the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF) to assess emotional intelligence of students at Hue University. The findings reveal that students at Hue University had relatively high EI with good ability in well-being, self-control emotions, and building relationship with others. Maintaining relationships and reacting appropriately to others' feelings were the lowest ability. Students at the University of Education had better EI than those at other university institutes due to some EI aspects of the educational curriculum. Males were better than females in Self-control. There was no difference in EI between students from rural and urban areas. These findings suggest that the EI development program should be included in the education program for undergraduate students and focus on developing emotionality.

**Key words:** emotional intelligence; cross-sectional study; mental health problems; students; youth.

### 1. Introduction

Youth is the early period of adulthood with the age range of 15 to 24, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2014). They are starting to get involved in complex relationships and situations that they might have never gone through before. They encounter new challenges and experiences. The desire of proving themselves to others is developed. In other words, adolescence tries to understand who they are. However, adults have yet to admit them into the world of adulthood. Therefore, youth is at a high risk of emotional vulnerability and inability to handle emotions, which adds to the risk of low academic performance, dropping

out, unemployment, and then becoming a burden to family and society (Karibeeran & Mohanty, 2019).

Literature has shown that emotional intelligence (EI) can help people manage their emotions and handle relationships (Tyagi & Komal, 2018). EI was first created by Salovey and Mayer in 1990 based on the combination between emotion and intellect. However, until 1996, Daniel Goleman was the person who made this term popular with the book "Emotional Intelligence" (Goleman, 1995). At that time, Goleman defined EI as an ability of a person to identify and control their emotions and others (Goleman, 2001). Since then, EI has been investigated by many researchers. Currently, there are three approaches of EI, which are ability, trait, and mixed models. Salovey and Mayer developed the ability model, and it has remained the only ability EI model nowadays. In this model, EI is understood as the ability of a person to solve emotional information of themselves and others and then use the information to decide how to think and

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behave (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Petrides represents the trait model based on the perception of a person about their emotional traits, from which EI is a part of an individual's personality. In other words, trait EI is a person's self-perceptions, understanding, managing and utilizing of their own and others' emotional abilities (Petrides, 2010). The mixed model was developed by two famous authors, Bar-On and Goleman, with a slight difference. Bar-On emphasizes EI with the combination between ability aspects and the personality traits that impact a person's well-being (Bar-On, 1997), whereas Goleman focuses on performance (Goleman, 2001). In this study, the trait EI was adopted due to its better mental predictor (Martins et al. 2010), compared to other models that focus more on productivity in the workplace.

EI has been proved to reduce mental health problems among youth and adolescents. For example, EI is negatively related to stress (Armstrong, 2011; Extremera & Rey, 2016), aggressiveness in relationships (Fernandez-Gonzalez, Calvete, Orue, & Echezarraga, 2018), depression and anxiety (Balluerka, Aritzeta, Gorostiaga, Gartzia, & Soroa, 2013; Fernández-Berocal, Alcaide, Extremera, & Pizarro, 2006; Mehmood & Gulzar, 2014). A study by Davis and Humphrey (2012) reported that EI could help improve adolescents' mental health through programs at school. EI also enhances social interaction (Lopes, Nezlek, Schutz, Sellin, & Salovey, 2004), life satisfaction and happiness (Mehmood & Gulzar, 2014) among teenagers.

Vietnam is a lower-middle-income country (The World Bank, 2011), with youth up to 20% of the national population. The rapid process of industrialization and modernization in Vietnam has caused young people to face new difficulties and challenges, leading to a high risk of psychological problems. The national prevalence of mental health problems among youth in 2014 was 12.4% (Weiss et al., 2014). A study by Nguyen et al. (2013) reported that the prevalence of depression symptoms among school students was 41.1%. However, only about 20% received the necessary medical assistance and treatment (UNICEF, 2018). On such a practical level, basic research on EI, which has been considered worldwide as a potential factor in preventing mental health disorders among young adults, is essential in Vietnam. Investigating EI needs special attention to promote effective and practical solutions to improve

young people's mental health and emotional capacity in Vietnam. Some studies in Vietnam have investigated EI among teachers, adolescents, and university students (Duong, 2004; Dinh et al., 2015; Doan, 2014; Tran, 2013; Le, 2020; Do et al., 2020). These studies, however, focus on students of nursing programs from the North or those of education programs from the South. There is a lack of information about EI among young adults in Central Vietnam. Therefore, the present study attempted to investigate EI among university students in Central Vietnam.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were 503 students randomly selected from the first and second years of the University of Education, University of Economics, University of Sciences, and University of Foreign languages of Hue University. There were 136 males and 367 females aged 19 to 27 ( $M = 20.44$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ). Approximate 48% of the students were born and grew up in rural areas. Most of the participants are Kinh people.

### 2.2. Instruments

In this study, to investigate EI among university students, the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue-SF) short version (Petrides & Furnham, 2001) was used due to its convenience and popularity. The questionnaire includes 30 items, followed the seven-point Likert style, ranging from 1 "*Strongly Disagree*" to 7 "*Strongly Agree*". The TEIQue-SF has been used in England (Mikolajczak, Petride, Coumans, & Lumiet, 2009; Petrides, 2006) and Greece (Stamatopoulou, Galanis, Tzavella, Petrides, & Prezerakos, 2017) with Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.81 to 0.87. The questionnaire has four components, which are: Well-being (including happiness, optimism, and self-esteem), Self-control (ability of stress management and emotional regulation), Emotionality (empathy, ability of emotional expression and perception, and building relationships with others), and Sociability (assertiveness, emotional management and ability to maintain social relationships). Each subscale's score was the average of all related items. The total EI, named Global EI, was achieved by summing all items and then divided by 30. In this sample, Cronbach's alpha for the total EI was 0.81.

### 2.3. Procedure

Explanatory statements and consent forms were sent to potential participants from randomly selected schools in rural and urban areas in Central Vietnam. Only students voluntarily participating became target participants of this study. Students' sex considered as the second strata.

### 2.4. Data analysis

In this process, we used the following metrics: SPSS 26.0 to calculate the average score achieved by each factor as well as that of each group of factors; Standard Deviation to evaluate the dispersion or variation of scores around the mean; independent 2-sample *t*-test and one-way ANOVA to compare the difference in the degree of EI of university students from different perspectives. The mean values were considered to be statistically significant with a probability of  $p < 0.05$ . The multiple linear regression was applied to evaluate the prediction of demographic information to EI.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Emotional intelligence among Hue university students

EI among students at Hue university is presented in Table 1. The mean of the Global EI and all its subscales amidst Hue University's students were above 4.0. Furthermore, the percentage of participants with the mean of Global EI from 3.5 to 5.0 was 77.7% and from 5.0 to 6.4 was 14.9%. Among the components of EI, the highest mean score belonged to Well-being (*Mean* =

4.98), followed by Sociability ( $M = 4.28$ ) and Self-Control ( $M = 4.24$ ). The lowest mean score was Emotionality ( $M = 4.12$ ).

**Table 1.** Students' EI among students by universities

Subscales	Min	Max	M	SD
Well-being	2.17	7.00	<b>4.98</b>	0.99
Self-Control	2.00	6.67	4.24	0.86
Sociability	2.00	7.00	4.28	0.82
Emotionality	2.00	6.63	4.12	0.72
Global EI	2.73	6.40	4.38	0.61

Note:  $1 \leq M \leq 5$ ; SD: Standard Deviation

### 3.2. Comparison of the EI means among students from different universities

Illustrated in Table 2 was the mean differences in EI and its components between students from different universities. The findings showed significant differences in EI between students of the University of Education and the University of Sciences, and the University of Economics. Specifically, students at University of Education had higher scores than those at University of Sciences in Global EI ( $t = 0.23, p < 0.05$ ), Well-being ( $t = 0.44, p < 0.05$ ), Self-control ( $t = 0.31, p < 0.05$ ), and Sociability ( $t = 0.27, p < 0.05$ ). Students at University of Education also showed better scores than those at University of Economics in Global EI ( $t = 0.14, p < 0.05$ ) and Self-Control ( $t = 0.21, p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2.** Comparison of the EI Means among students in different universities

Contents	University of Education (1)		University of Economics (2)		University of Sciences (3)		University of Foreign Language (4)		F (2,501)	Significant Difference
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Well-being	5.15	0.99	4.94	0.91	4.71	1.11	4.99	0.86	0.44*	1 > 3
Self-control	4.48	0.92	4.17	0.77	4.07	0.91	4.23	0.71	0.31*	1 > 2, 3
Sociability	4.38	0.83	4.24	0.75	4.11	0.89	4.34	0.76	0.27*	1 > 3
Emotionality	4.13	0.74	4.10	0.70	4.18	0.71	4.05	0.73	0.03	
Global EI	4.48	0.62	4.34	0.55	4.24	0.67	4.37	0.54	0.23*	1 > 2, 3

Note: M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation; \*  $p < 0.05$

The highest ability recorded among students at Hue University was Well-being. This meant that the University’s students seemed confident, optimistic, cheerful, satisfied with their current life, self-confident, and they also valued their achievements. The capacity of Sociability was relatively high, which meant that the students understood their ability to manage emotions and influence other people's feelings. They were also aware of the connection in society and, therefore, became accomplished networkers. Additionally, the students showed quite an assertiveness, which was the willingness to stand up for their rights.

**3.3. Comparison of EI means among students by sex**

The sex difference in the level of EI is presented in Table 3. In general, there was no difference between male

and female students in Global EI ( $t = 1.77; p > 0.05$ ), Well-being ( $t = 1.21; p > 0.05$ ), Sociability ( $t = 1.55; p > 0.05$ ), and Emotionality ( $t = 0.48; p > 0.05$ ). However, there was a significant difference between two sexes in Self-Control component ( $t = 2.42; p < 0.05$ ), in which males ( $M = 4.39, SD = 0.95$ ) seemed to have higher ability in Self-Control than females ( $M = 4.18, SD = 0.82$ ).

**3.4. Comparison of the EI means among students by residence area**

The difference in EI between students in rural and urban areas was also investigated and presented in Table 4. In general, our study showed no significant difference in Global EI and all EI components between the two groups ( $p > 0.05$ ).

*Table 3. Comparison of the EI Means among students by sex*

Subscales	Male		Female		t (503)	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Well-being	5.07	1.07	4.95	0.96	1.21	0.23
Self-Control	4.39	0.95	4.18	0.82	<b>2.42*</b>	<b>0.02</b>
Sociability	4.32	0.96	4.27	0.76	0.55	0.58
Emotionality	4.15	0.81	4.11	0.68	0.48	0.63
Global EI	4.46	0.71	4.35	0.57	1.77	0.08

Note: M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation; \*  $p < 0.05$

*Table 4. Comparison of EI Means among students by residence area*

Subscales	Urban		Rural		t (503)	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Well-being	5.03	1.01	4.94	0.97	0.99	0.32
Self-Control	4.23	0.88	4.25	0.84	-0.32	0.75
Sociability	4.29	0.83	4.28	0.80	0.09	0.93
Emotionality	4.13	0.73	4.11	0.71	0.23	0.82
Global EI	4.39	0.63	4.36	0.59	0.40	0.69

Note: M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

**3.5. Comparison of EI means among students by parents' marital status**

The marital status of the participants' parents was included to investigate whether there is disparity in EI level between students who have parents with different marital status. Findings presented in Table 5 showed that, in general, there was no significant difference in Global EI level, Sociability, Emotionality and Well-being

among students who had parents living together or divorced or separated ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, there was a significant difference in Self-Control ability between students who had parents living together and those who lost at least one parent ( $F(3, 500) = 0.24, p < 0.05$ ). No difference was found between students with parents divorced/separated and those who lost at least one parent regarding Self-Control ability ( $F(3, 500) = 0.38, p > 0.05$ ).

### 3.6. Prediction of demographic information to EI among Hue University students

The prediction of demographic information to EI among Hue University students is presented in Table 6. It can be seen from the data that age and the place where students are pursuing their undergraduate programs can

predict Well-being, Self-control, Emotionality and Global EI. Sex can predict Self-control and Global EI, whereas ethnicity can predict Sociability. Demographic statistics predict Well-being, Self-control, Sociability, Emotionality and Global EI at 4%, 4.1%, 2%, 1% and 3.9%, respectively.

**Table 5.** Comparison of the EI Means between students by parents' marital status

Contents	Living together (1)		Divorced/ Separated (2)		Lost (One or both) (3)		F(2,501)	Significant Difference
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Well-being	5.01	0.98	5.08	1.00	4.74	1.04	0.27	-
Self-control	4.26	0.86	4.40	0.95	4.02	0.81	<b>0.24*</b>	<b>3 &gt; 1</b>
Sociability	4.29	0.82	4.37	0.45	4.26	0.82	0.11	-
Emotionality	4.12	0.73	4.20	0.65	4.11	0.64	0.09	-
Global EI	4.39	0.61	4.53	0.61	4.27	0.60	0.27	-

Note: M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation; \*  $p < 0.05$

**Table 6.** The prediction of demographic information to EI among Hue University students

	Well-being	Self-control	Sociability	Emotionality	Global EI
Sex	-0.06	<b>0.14**</b>	-0.03	-0.04	<b>-0.10*</b>
Age	<b>0.11*</b>	<b>0.12*</b>	0.07	<b>0.09*</b>	<b>0.14**</b>
Parents' marital status	-0.08	-0.08	0.01	-0.02	-0.06
Number of siblings	0.03	0.03	0.01	-0.02	0.02
Ethnicity	-0.08	0.01	<b>-0.13**</b>	-0.05	-0.09
Religion	0.03	-0.06	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02
Residence	-0.04	0.03	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
University	<b>-0.13**</b>	<b>-0.11*</b>	0.03	<b>-0.10*</b>	<b>-0.11*</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	0.040	0.041	0.02	0.01	0.039

## 4. Discussion

This study aims to understand the EI level of Hue University students and its relationship with study location, sex, residence location and parents' marital status. We also acknowledge some limitations in this study. First, the data collected through a self-report questionnaire may affect the result performance because of response bias. Future studies should include integrative methods (combining qualitative and quantitative research). Second, the cross-sectional design can only provide simple descriptive statistics at one point in time. The conclusion, therefore, is not highly generalizable. A study with a longitudinal section design

to confirm the results of this study is an essential suggestion for future studies.

The students in our study had Global EI level above average, which is higher than those recorded in the study of Prayde, Walraven, Karki, and Flaherty conducted in 2015 on thirty young people (Mean age = 15.30, SD = 1.64) using the same scale (Mean Global EI = 4.12, SD = 0.73). The difference might come from the limited sample size in the Prayde et al.'s study (2015). However, our Global EI was lower than that achieved in a 2010 study conducted on 512 students from five universities in the UK, in which the mean score of Global EI was 4.72 (SD = 0.57) (Sanchez-Ruiz, Perez-Gonzalez, & Petrides, 2010). The disparity might result from the instrument

used for assessing EI. Although the tool was developed by the same author, in our study we employed the short version of the TEIQue with 30 items whereas Sanchez-Ruiz et al. used the full version of the TEIQue with 153 items. Locally, the students in this sample had EI higher than that of 112 nursing students at Hai Phong University of Medicine (Do et al., 2020) and 420 nursing students at Nam Dinh Nursing University using the Bar-On EQ test (Le, 2020). Most students in these two studies were at average and under average level of EI. Compared to other Universities of Education in Vietnam, students at Hue University also had higher EI level than that of 753 students from Ho Chi Minh city University of Education measured by the MSCEIT (Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test) (Tran, 2013).

Among the four components of EI, the lowest mean score was found in the ability of Emotionality. This is the ability to maintain personal relationships, understand other people's perspectives (empathy), recognize their own and others' feelings (emotional perception). Therefore, although the students at Hue University understood the importance of connecting with other people in society, they had difficulty maintaining relationships and understanding their own and other people's emotions. This finding is in line with Doan's 2014 study among the students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Education (Doan, 2014). Vietnamese students love communicating but are very shy at the same time (Thi Ha, 2012). The shyness might prevent them from communication with others; therefore, their skills in maintaining relationships and understanding others are limited.

The students at the University of Education had better EI than those from other universities in Hue. They were more satisfied with life and better at valuing their achievements, withstanding pressure, managing stress, and controlling their own emotions. They are also better at positively influencing other people's feelings and handling networking with superior social skills. Understandably, the above-listed values are included in the educational and training curriculum for training pre-service teachers at Hue University of Education but not in other universities' curriculums. This finding proves one thing from previous studies: EI can be taught and developed through education and training (Clarke, 2006; Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Michel, 2009; Ruttledge & Petrides, 2012).

The male students scored higher than the female ones in Self-control, which is the ability to withstand pressure, thereby managing stress and controlling their emotions better than the other sex. This finding is in line with the report from Petrides's manual about trait EI (Petrides, 2009). It also shares the same conclusion with the study of Sanchez-Ruiz et al. in 2010 with 202 males and 310 females. This difference is also noted in a study on the personality of men and women related to self-control (Panfil & Kirkpatrick, 2020), in which males were considered to show calmer personality and better emotional control than females. There was no difference in EI between students from rural and urban areas. This result shares the same findings with other studies in India (Kumar, 2016; Gangal & Singh, 2012; Singaravelu, 2007; Bansibihari & Pathan, 2004). Self-control ability was significantly higher in students who had dual parents than those who lost one or both parents. It is believed that individuals raised by dual parents had higher levels of EI (Clarke-Stewart, Vandel, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000). Both parents might help children understand different emotional expressions between father and mother and better understand emotions (Dunsmore & Halberstadt, 1997). Students who lost one or both parents might experience emotional expressions from one parent or none of them; therefore, the development of their understanding, expressions, and reactions to others' emotions was rather limited.

Demographic information plays a role in predicting EI. However, the expected ratio is low in this sample. EI was demonstrated to be well predicted by personality and parenting styles (Q. A. Nguyen et al., 2019). However, these factors were not included in this study and should be considered in future research.

## 5. Conclusion

Trait EI is the self-perceptions about emotions of their own and other people, and it is also distinguishable from personality. Trait EI has been proved to have a positive association with better mental health. Therefore, basic research about EI among youth in Vietnam is necessary for developing further prevention and intervention programs to improve mental health. Our study revealed that the students at Hue University in this sample had relatively high EI, with good ability in well-

being, self-control emotions, and building relationship with others. However, maintaining relationships and reacting appropriately to others' feelings were lower than the remaining EI components. In general, there was a significant disparity in self-control between males and females, in which males were better than females. The students at the University of Education had better EI than other university institutes of Hue University. There was no difference in EI between the students from rural and urban areas. These findings suggest that the EI development program should be included in the education program for undergraduate students and focus on developing emotionality. Self-control should be prioritized for female students more than their counterparts.

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## TRÍ TUỆ CẢM XÚC CỦA SINH VIÊN ĐẠI HỌC HUẾ

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**Tóm tắt:** Tuổi trẻ là giai đoạn đầu của tuổi trưởng thành và có nhiều nguy cơ dễ bị tổn thương về cảm xúc có thể dẫn đến bệnh tâm thần. Nhiều nghiên cứu đã chỉ ra rằng trí tuệ cảm xúc có thể làm giảm các vấn đề sức khỏe tâm thần ở thanh thiếu niên. Bằng chứng cho thấy khoảng ba triệu thanh niên Việt Nam đang gặp các vấn đề về sức khỏe tâm thần, nhưng chỉ 20% được hỗ trợ và điều trị y tế cần thiết. Nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu mức độ trí tuệ cảm xúc và các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến nó ở thanh niên Việt Nam nhằm thúc đẩy các giải pháp hiệu quả và thiết thực nhằm nâng cao năng lực tinh thần và cảm xúc của thanh niên Việt Nam. Đây là nghiên cứu cắt ngang được tiến hành ở các trường Đại học trực thuộc Đại học Huế và sử dụng thang đo rút gọn về trí tuệ cảm xúc của Petrides (TEIQue-SF) nhằm đánh giá trí tuệ cảm xúc của sinh viên. Chỉ số tin cậy Cronbach's alpha cho TEIQue-SF trong mẫu nghiên cứu này là 0,81. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy sinh viên Đại học Huế có mức độ trí tuệ cảm xúc tương đối cao, thể hiện ở các năng lực về sức khỏe nói chung, năng lực tiết chế cảm xúc và thiết lập mối quan hệ với người khác. Năng lực duy trì mối quan hệ và phản ứng thích hợp với cảm xúc của người khác là ở mức độ thấp nhất trong tất cả các năng lực của trí tuệ cảm xúc. Sinh viên Đại học Sư phạm có năng lực trí tuệ cảm xúc tốt hơn sinh viên ở các trường Đại học khác do một số năng lực thành phần của trí tuệ cảm xúc được lồng ghép vào chương trình đào tạo. Nam giới tốt hơn nữ giới về năng lực tự chủ. Không có sự khác biệt về trí tuệ cảm xúc giữa sinh viên nông thôn và thành thị. Kết quả nghiên cứu này gợi ý rằng chương trình phát triển trí tuệ cảm xúc nên được đưa vào chương trình giáo dục cho sinh viên đại học và tập trung vào phát triển năng lực duy trì quan hệ và phản ứng thích hợp với cảm xúc của người khác.

**Từ khóa:** trí tuệ cảm xúc; nghiên cứu cắt ngang; vấn đề về sức khỏe tâm thần; sinh viên, tuổi trẻ.