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Assessment of Emotional Intelligence in the UadeC Academic Community after the COVID-19 Pandemic

Evaluación de la Inteligencia Emocional en la Comunidad Académica de la UAdeC después de la Pandemia de COVID-19

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to analyze the self-perception of emotional intelligence among the academic population upon emerging from confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic and returning to university campuses. Specifically, this study focuses on evaluating the emotional intelligence of students and faculty at the Autonomous University of Coahuila (UAdeC) during the June-December 2022 semester. Using a targeted sampling method, 2,857 valid responses were collected from undergraduate and graduate students and faculty who completed the Wong-Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS). The survey was conducted online, allowing easy access to the academic community throughout the state of Coahuila, Mexico. The results show that university students and professors recognize and use their emotions, as well as being able to assess the emotions of those around them. However, they acknowledge that they need support to properly manage these emotions. Therefore, it is necessary for university authorities and the Ministry of Education to provide the necessary tools to achieve this through courses and workshops for students and professors. This research will benefit and contribute to the field of educators, scientists, students, and parents, and due to the large sample used, the findings can be generalized to larger academic populations in northeastern Mexico. The findings in this article will help us understand the academic pressures students and teachers face and how to implement cultural and educational changes to improve their emotional intelligence.

Keywords:

Emotional intelligence, academic population, COVID-19

Resumen:

El propósito de este estudio es analizar la autopercepción de la inteligencia emocional que posee la población académica al salir del confinamiento por la pandemia del COVID-19 y asistir nuevamente a las instalaciones universitarias. En particular, el presente estudio se centra en evaluar la inteligencia emocional de estudiantes y profesores de la Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila (UAdeC) en el semestre junio-diciembre del 2022. Mediante un método de muestreo dirigido, se recolectaron 2,857 respuestas válidas de estudiantes y profesores de pregrado y posgrado que respondieron la Escala de Inteligencia Emocional Wong-Law (WLEIS). La encuesta se realizó en línea, para llegar fácilmente a la comunidad académica de todo el estado de Coahuila, México. Los resultados muestran que los estudiantes y profesores de la universidad reconocen y hacen uso de sus emociones, así como que son capaces de evaluar las emociones de las personas que los rodean. Sin embargo, reconocen que necesitan apoyo para controlar adecuadamente dichas emociones. Por lo que es necesario, que las autoridades de la Universidad y de la Secretaría de Educación proporcionen las herramientas requeridas para ello, a través de cursos y talleres impartidos a estudiantes y profesores. Esta investigación beneficiará y contribuirá al campo de los educadores, científicos, estudiantes y padres y, debido a la gran muestra utilizada, los hallazgos se pueden generalizar a poblaciones académicas más grandes en el noreste de México. Los hallazgos de este artículo ayudarán a comprender las presiones académicas que enfrentan los estudiantes y profesores y a cómo implementar cambios culturales y educativos para mejorar su inteligencia emocional.

***Palabras Clave**:*

Inteligencia emocional, población académica, COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak has brought drastic changes to all aspects of life, including emotional well-being. The psychological impact of the pandemic on people is evident, with anxiety, depression, and stress becoming increasingly prevalent. In Mexico, many have felt the emotional and psychological toll of the pandemic, with a significant number of people experiencing mental health issues. This research article aims to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the emotional intelligence of the Mexican academic population, focusing on students and faculty. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on the psychological impact of COVID-19, with a specific focus on Mexico.

Health, as defined by the World Health Organization, "is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 2022, p. 2). Mental health refers to personal well-being achieved through emotional and intellectual growth derived from interactions with others. According to the WHO (2022), mental health can be affected by socioeconomic factors experienced by individuals and communities. Determining factors include emotions and interactions with others.

An individual with good mental health possesses the skills required to overcome the stressors of everyday life, enabling them to work productively and thus contribute to their community. Mental health contributes to improving individual and community attitudes, enabling them to achieve their goals (INCyTU, 2018).

Several studies have highlighted the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the general population worldwide. In Mexico, even before the pandemic, 32% of the population over 12 years of age had reported feeling depressed, and 66.9% of them had experienced it several times a year (INEGI, 2017). However, the pandemic has resulted in a significant increase in rates of anxiety and depression. According to the National Mental Health Survey, the prevalence of anxiety symptoms in Mexico increased from 14.3% in 2018 to 24.6% in 2020, and the prevalence of depressive symptoms increased from 5.2% to 8.6% in the same period (Medina-Mora, 2020).

Previous research has also shown that students and academic staff have seen their mental health significantly affected by the pandemic. A UNAM study reported that 64.4% of university students in Mexico experienced anxiety and stress due to COVID-19 (Buitrago and Hernández, 2020). In other research, students have commented that the pandemic highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence for properly managing stressful situations (Godlet et al., 2022).

Emotional intelligence is a key factor in coping with stress and anxiety. Research has shown that emotional intelligence can act as a protective factor against stress and negative emotions (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2020). Furthermore, studies have shown that people with higher emotional intelligence are better able to cope with the effects of COVID-19 (Kornas-Biela, Martynowska, & Zysberg, 2023).

Awareness, management, and empathy are considered the basic components of emotional intelligence, which are especially important for people to be able to handle difficult situations (Drigas and Papoutsi, 2020).

Emotional intelligence has also proven to be an effective tool for properly managing work activity by moderating the stress felt by the pandemic (Sadovyy, Sánchez-Gómez and Bresó, 2021).

It is also important to mention that in some comparative studies, such as that by Sánchez-Cabrero et al. (2022), emotional intelligence in students did not show any differences before and after the pandemic. However, other authors argue that emotional intelligence helps students find a learning style that suits each of them. Furthermore, the results are even better if the activities they engage in are actively and cognitively relevant to students, even in hybrid learning contexts (Navaratnam, 2023).

Although most previous studies support the idea that emotional intelligence helps the academic community better cope with the return of in-person activities, this study seeks to verify this, especially by gathering information in the final stages of the pandemic.

METHODOS

The methodology is a cross-sectional study and uses a purposive sampling method.

A quantitative cross-sectional design methodology with a descriptive approach was used. A total of 2,857 valid surveys were collected. The sample was formed using proportional stratified sampling, ensuring representativeness of the academic community, particularly students and faculty. Data collection was conducted through online surveys, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent of participants. The data were subsequently analysed using SPSS statistical software.

The Wong-Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) developed by Wong and Law (2002) has proven to be a model with adequate validity to identify specific behaviors related to the emotional intelligence of academic communities (Merino-Soto et al., 2019). This scale was developed as a self-report tool where the individual expresses their level of agreement with 16 statements on a 7-point Likert scale. The WLEIS Scale measures four dimensions of Emotional Intelligence: 1) SEA: evaluation of own emotions, 2) OEA: evaluation of emotions of others, 3) UOE: use of emotions and 4) ROE: regulation of emotions.

The scale was included in a broader measurement instrument (survey) designed by the State Observatory of Health and Well-being of the Autonomous University of Coahuila (UAdeC). The instrument was designed on the Survey Monkey platform and distributed to the database of undergraduate and graduate students and faculty, provided by the University Rector's Office.

The data were collected during the months of June-November 2022, months in which the academic community had returned to in-person activities at the university facilities after the COVID-19 lockdown.

RESULTS

Data were collected at the three UAdeC units in the state of Coahuila. A total of 3,433 valid responses were obtained for the entire questionnaire; however, only 2,857 participants (83.2%) responded to the emotional intelligence scale. Thirty-five percent of the responses came from the Torreón Unit, 34.9% from the North Unit, and 29.8% from the Saltillo Unit. Forty-three colleges and schools and two research centers participated. Respondents accessed the survey from more than 44 cities in the state. Table 1 shows the ages and age ranges of the participants. Nearly 80% of the participants were 21 years old or younger, indicating that they were undergraduate students, as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1. Age

Range	Frequency	%
18 years old	659	23.1%
19 years old	612	21.4%
20 years	587	20.5%
21 years old	394	13.8%
22-25 years old	359	12.6%
26-30 years old	111	3.9%
31-40 years old	84	2.9%
41 to 50 years old	31	1.1%
51 years or older	20	0.7%
Total	2,857	100%

Source: Own elaboration

Table 2 shows the remaining demographic data of the participants who took the emotional intelligence test. 89% of the respondents had already completed high school and were currently pursuing a professional degree. 8.1% of the respondents had completed their professional studies, and only 2.9% had a postgraduate degree. Women accounted for 67.7% of the responses. 90.9% were single, and 75.6% reported a household income of less than $11,600 pesos per month.

Table 2. Demographic data

	Frequency	%
Schooling completed		
Preparatory	2,545	89.0%
Degree	231	8.1%
Mastery	59	2.1%
Doctorate	22	0.8%
Total	2,857	100%
Gender		
Women	1,935	67.7%
Men	922	32.3%
Total	2,857	100%
Marital status		
Single	2,598	90.9%
Married	137	4.8%
Free union	92	3.2%
Divorced	28	1.0%
Widow	2	0.1%
Total	2,857	100%
Family monthly income		
Less than $6,800	1,166	40.8%
$6,800 - $11,599	995	34.8%
$11,660 - $34,999	579	20.3%
$35,000 - $84,999	96	3.4%
More than $85,000	21	0.7%
Total	2,857	100%

Source: Own elaboration

Table 3 shows participants' responses to each item on the scale. All items have a positive valence, so obtaining higher scores on the scale reflects an adequate recognition of one's own emotions and those of those around them.

In general, the academic community reports adequate recognition and management of their emotions and those of others in their community. All items received the highest proportion of responses at levels 5, 6, and 7 of the scale, indicating agreement with each of the statements.

By calculating the average of the three highest scores of the four items that make up each dimension of the model, it can be determined that the dimensions in which participants evaluate themselves best are, in order of importance: evaluation of the emotions of others (OEA) with 23.9%, evaluation of one's own emotions (SEA) with 22.6%, use of one's own emotions (UOE) with 21.6%, and finally regulation of one's own emotions (ROE) with 19.5%.

The dimension that requires the most attention, due to its lowest score, is emotion regulation. This contrasts with the highest-scoring dimension, emotion recognition. This response indicates that UAdeC students and faculty express their ability to recognize the emotions they feel; however, they do not consider themselves equipped with the appropriate tools to self-regulate them.

CONCLUSIONS

Data collection took place during the months when the pandemic was still ongoing, but in-person activities had resumed at UAdeC facilities, at least partially or in a hybrid format. This situation helps us understand the participants' responses, who express a good recognition of their own emotions and those of others. They also express the ability to appropriately use their emotions, which allows them to set appropriate work goals and establish action plans to adequately achieve them. In other words, the academic community expresses the ability to be productive and function adequately in their interactions with others.

Table 3. Response to the WLEIS scale by dimension expressed as a percentage.

		Completely Disagree						Completely agree	
Dimension	**Item**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	Total
Self-Emotion Assessment (SEA)	Most of the time I can distinguish why I have certain feelings	3.3%	3.0%	7.8%	17.4%	25.6%	21.0%	21.7%	100%
	I have a good understanding of my own emotions	3.3%	4.4%	9.3%	18.2%	24.0%	20.4%	20.4%	100%
	I really understand what I feel	3.7%	5.9%	9.3%	17.2%	21.7%	20.8%	21.4%	100%
	I always know if I'm happy or not.	3.2%	3.5%	6.0%	13.6%	15.3%	19.8%	38.5%	100%
Assessment of the emotions of others (AEO)	I always know my friends' emotions through their behaviors.	2.5%	4.1%	7.8%	17.7%	24.9%	22.6%	20.3%	100%
	I am a good observer of the emotions of others	3.2%	3.3%	6.3%	14.0%	21.5%	24.2%	27.6%	100%
	I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others	4.1%	4.4%	6.7%	13.3%	18.3%	22.2%	31.0%	100%
	I have a good understanding of the emotions of the people around me.	2.5%	2.6%	5.6%	14.9%	22.9%	24.5%	26.8%	100%
Use of emotions (UOE)	I always set goals and then try my best to achieve them.	2.6%	4.1%	7.1%	14.7%	19.4%	21.8%	30.2%	100%
	I always tell myself that I am a competent person.	5.3%	6.0%	9.6%	17.1%	18.8%	18.0%	25.2%	100%
	I am a self-motivated person	6.3%	7.3%	10.4 %	16.1%	17.8%	17.2%	24.9%	100%
	I always encourage myself to do my best.	4.5%	6.5%	8.7%	14.0%	18.0%	18.7%	29.6%	100%
Regulation of emotions (ROE)	I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.	4.3%	5.6%	9.5%	17.8%	22.6%	20.7%	19.4%	100%
	I am able to control my own emotions	4.6%	6.3%	9.6%	18.3%	23.5%	19.2%	19.0%	100%
	I can calm down easily when I feel angry	6.7%	8.0%	12.1 %	20.0%	20.5%	15.6%	17.1%	100%
	I have good control over my own emotions	4.9%	6.7%	11.4 %	20.5%	21.5%	17.0%	18.0%	100%

Source: Own elaboration

Previous studies have found that emotional intelligence could act as a protective element against stress, as the two were negatively correlated (Ahmad et al., 2022). However, the self-regulation dimension is the one that requires the attention of university authorities, as participants, although they recognize their emotions, do not consider themselves capable of regulating them. Counseling and training are needed to help students and faculty properly manage their emotions. This includes teaching them to suppress the thoughts that cause emotional distress or to distance themselves from those thoughts so that they view them more objectively, allowing them to make decisions with a clear mind; and teaching them emotional management techniques through relaxation techniques and meditation (Schetsche, Gago-Galvagno, & Mustaca, 2023). With this, the academic community will be able to overcome situations of depression and anxiety that are common among the population because of confinement due to the pandemic.

Proper emotional management is recognized by the WHO as an integral and basic part of mental health, which will allow individuals in the academic community to achieve higher levels of well-being.

The need to develop and cultivate emotional intelligence from the outset, starting in the field of education, is clearly evident so that adults in the academic community can cope with stressful situations. Studies such as that by Drigas and Papoutsi (2020)

have shown that people with high emotional intelligence are better able to manage and mitigate stress, as well as adopt resilience and control strategies.

The upcoming research agenda should assess the contribution of social relationships within the academic community. That is, evaluate how psychological social support can contribute to better management of emotional intelligence to achieve mental health. Specifically, it could be assessed how individual and social resources work together to help maintain psychological integrity in times of crisis, which would allow for the well-being of individuals and the academic community at large (Kornas-Biela et al., 2023).

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