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The role of emotional intelligence in higher education—an empirical study of business student' performance

Rola inteligencji emocjonalnej w szkolnictwie wyższym – empiryczne badanie wyników studentów kierunku biznesowego

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Abstract

This article examines the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) in higher education, exploring its key competencies and role in educational processes. Against the backdrop of rapid technological development and labour market transformation, emotional intelligence has become increasingly valuable for professions that cannot be easily automated. The study presents empirical research conducted among 41 first- and second-year students of the Business Development Strategies program at the University of Economics in Krakow. Using the standardized TEIQue-SF questionnaire, the researchers analysed emotional intelligence levels and their relationship with academic performance between the gender and academic year groups. Statistical analysis included normality tests (Shapiro-Wilk), homogeneity of variance tests (Bartlett), ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation analysis. The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in EI levels between genders or academic years, and a weak positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic grades. These findings highlight the potential to develop emotional competencies as a supporting element in teaching and learning effectiveness. The study recommends systematic integration of emotional intelligence development programs in higher education curricula and suggests future research directions including longitudinal studies and mixed-method approaches to better understand EI's impact on academic success.

Keywords

emotional intelligence, higher education, academic performance, student development, TEIQue-SF questionnaire

1. Introduction

Contemporary higher education faces unprecedented challenges due to rapid technological advancement, automation, and the development of artificial intelligence. These transformations have fundamentally altered the landscape of the labour market, and many traditional professions are increasingly susceptible to automation. In this context, the development of uniquely human competencies, particularly emotional intelligence (EI), has gained critical importance for students preparing to enter the modern workforce.

Research indicates that professions that require high levels of emotional intelligence, including social work, healthcare, leadership roles, education, and creative fields, are among the most likely to remain relevant in the coming decades (*Eternal…*, 2024). These careers share common characteristics: they demand complex interpersonal communication, empathy, creative problem-solving, and the ability to navigate nuanced human emotions and relationships. Consequently, universities must increasingly focus on developing these emotional competencies alongside traditional academic knowledge.

For students in business and management programs, emotional intelligence becomes particularly crucial, as future professionals will need to lead diverse teams, manage organizational change, and navigate complex stakeholder relationships in an increasingly automated world. The ability to understand and manage emotions, both one's own and others, represents a competitive advantage that technology cannot easily replicate.

This study examines the current state of emotional intelligence among university students, specifically analysing first- and second-year students in the Business Development Strategies program at the University of Economics in Krakow. By understanding the emotional competency levels of these future business professionals, we can better assess how higher education institutions might enhance their curricula to prepare students for careers that require high emotional intelligence.

2. Theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence

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. Emotional intelligence fundamentally influences an individual's capacity to engage in effective learning, adapt to evolving circumstances, develop interpersonal competencies, and construct a coherent personal identity. Students exhibiting elevated levels of emotional intelligence typically demonstrate superior academic achievement, enhanced resilience in managing stress and conflicts, and more effective social interactions.

The cultivation of emotional intelligence extends beyond advancing individual academic outcomes. It also fosters institutional success. Leaders possessing high emotional intelligence facilitate collaborative, innovative, and growth-oriented organizational climates.

While technical proficiency may secure initial professional advancement, sustained leadership efficacy requires emotional competencies. These skills underpin effective team coaching, stress regulation, constructive feedback delivery, and collaborative engagement essential

for leadership roles. It's called emotional intelligence, and it's one of the most sought-after interpersonal skills in the workplace. Research conducted in the United States in 2011 showed that more than 60% of employers value emotional intelligence more than technical skills and IQ when evaluating candidates (CareerBuilder, 2011).

Lauren Landry in her work *Why emotional intelligence is important in leadership* allocates four interconnected core competencies of emotional intelligence (Landry, 2019):

1. Self-awareness.
2. Self-management.
3. Social awareness.
4. Relationship management.

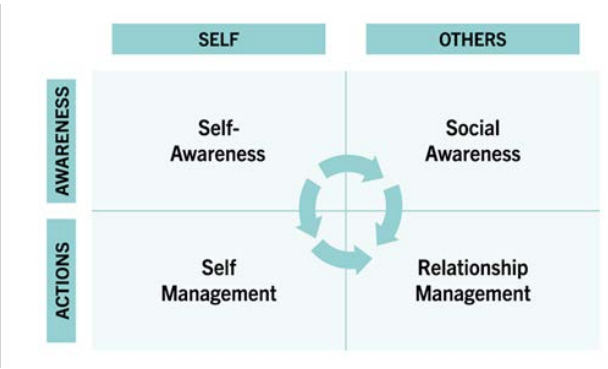

Figure 1. Core competencies of Emotional intelligence

S o u r c e: Landry, 2019.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman identified five key personal and interpersonal skills involved in emotional intelligence (*The 5 elements…*, 2024).

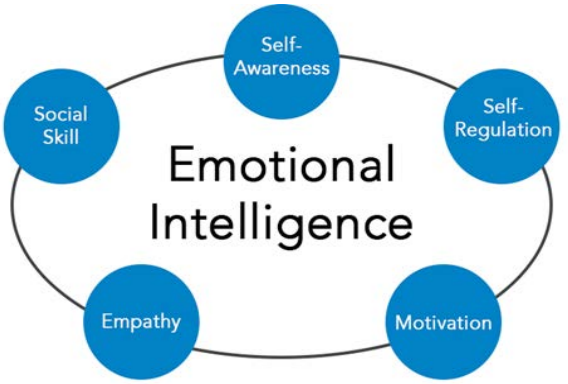

Figure 2. Emotional intelligence

S o u r c e: Campbell, 2016.

Emotional intelligence comprises five core components that collectively underpin an individual's capacity to effectively perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions in personal and social contexts.

Self-awareness entails the recognition and comprehension of one's own emotions—identifying what one is feeling and why—coupled with an appreciation of how these emotions influence interpersonal dynamics. This foundational component facilitates intuitive, informed decision-making and fosters insight into one's strengths, limitations, and value systems.

Self-regulation follows emotional awareness and involves the deliberate management of emotional responses, particularly negative affect. It encompasses maintaining composure, exercising restraint in emotionally charged situations, and adhering to personal ethical standards, thereby promoting accountability and emotional equilibrium.

Motivation reflects an intrinsic drive to attain personal goals through setting elevated standards and persisting despite obstacles. It integrates optimism and resilience, encouraging proactive engagement and assertiveness to capitalize on opportunities, even in adverse circumstances.

Empathy is a quintessential interpersonal skill involving the capacity to adopt another's perspective and attune to their emotional states. Beyond recognition, it entails appropriate emotional responsiveness and embodies respect for diversity and inclusion. Effective communication, including verbal and non-verbal cues, is integral to empathetic interactions.

Social skills denote adeptness in navigating social environments, characterized by trustworthiness, effective communication, and collaborative abilities. Socially skilled individuals excel in both listening and articulating, inspire collective motivation, and proficiently manage change, conflict, and group dynamics.

The literature has demonstrated a positive impact of emotional intelligence (EI) and academic self-esteem on academic performance in undergraduate studies, with significant gender differences: women demonstrate increased emotional attention and self-esteem, while men demonstrate greater emotional clarity and the ability to repair (Ubago-Jiménez et al., 2024).

Further empirical evidence from a Chinese sample integrating EI theory with positive psychological constructs highlights that emotional intelligence positively influences academic achievement and psychological well-being through mediation by self-efficacy, motivation, and resilience. These mediating effects are notably stronger among postgraduate students, underscoring the role of adaptive psychological characteristics in optimizing both well-being and academic success (Shengyao et al., 2024).

Complementing these findings, research from Nepal using the Schutte Self-Report EI Test (SSEIT) demonstrates a robust positive correlation between EI and academic outcomes, with self-regulation and motivation identified as salient predictors. The study advocates for integrated curricular initiatives that foster emotional competencies to advance sustainable higher education and holistic student success (Shrestha, 2025).

The significance of university professors' emotional competencies, particularly empathy, emotion regulation, and interpersonal skills, has been systematically reviewed, indicating substantial positive effects on student engagement, motivation, and academic satisfaction, alongside indirect enhancements of psychological well-being. Contextual moderators such as cultural

background and teaching modality warrant further investigation to inform faculty development and institutional policy (De Souza & Jacomuzzi, 2025).

Moreover, the importance of cultivating compassion and engagement as pathways through which EI enhances academic performance is supported by structural equation modelling among secondary and higher education students. Emotional intelligence's role transcends short-term academic outcomes, contributing to the formation of cooperative, compassionate societies aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (Estrada et al., 2021).

A study using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) corroborates the positive association of self-emotion appraisal and emotion utilization with academic success, while noting cultural variations and gender-related differences in EI expressions. This underscores the necessity for culturally sensitive applications of EI measurement and development in higher education contexts (Halimi et al., 2020).

Behavioural research on medical students reinforces the predictive capacity of EI in academic performance, especially competencies related to motivation and self-regulation, advocating for their integration into medical curricula to foster professional readiness and academic excellence (Mahmud et al., 2025).

3. Objective and research methodology

The purpose of this research was to determine the level of emotional intelligence among first- and second-year students of the Business Development Strategies program at the University of Economics in Krakow. The specific aim of the study was to: (1) analyse the relationship between emotional intelligence levels and academic performance (grade point average); (2) assess the extent to which emotional intelligence influences student functioning in the academic environment; and (3) indicate whether there are significant differences in intelligence levels between students of different academic years and genders.

The empirical study involved a total of 41 students in the Business Development Strategies program, including 17 men and 24 women. Participants were in their first year (22 students) or second year (19 students) of study, reflecting the target population of undergraduates within this specific academic track.

Given the convenience sampling approach and the limited sample size, this study adopts an exploratory and pilot character. The findings are intended to generate hypotheses and provide preliminary insights rather than establish definitive causal relationships or generalizable conclusions. The results should be interpreted within the specific context of business education at one Polish university, acknowledging the inherent limitations in external validity that accompany single-institution, cross-sectional designs.

Participants were recruited through voluntary participation, ensuring an ethical approach without coercion or compensation. Data were collected between 1 September and 1 October 2025 via an online survey. Data collection was carried out by administering the TEIQue-SF self-report questionnaire in an online format, designed to measure core aspects of emotional intelligence.

The following research hypotheses were tested:
H1: The distribution of emotional intelligence test results among Business Development Strategies students is the same regardless of gender (gender has no significant impact on emotional intelligence level).
H2: The distribution of emotional intelligence test results among Business Development Strategies students is the same regardless of academic year (academic year has no significant impact on emotional intelligence level).

The research used the standardized TEIQue-SF self-report questionnaire developed by Petrides and Furnham, containing questions on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree, 7 = completely agree) (Petrides & Furnham, 2006). The questionnaire covers key aspects of emotional intelligence: emotional awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills.

It is worth noting that despite using the previously validated TEIQue-SF questionnaire, the internal consistency reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha obtained in this study was relatively low ($\alpha = 0.51$). This result can be partly explained by the high heterogeneity of the studied sample, which is a natural phenomenon in research on individual traits such as emotional intelligence. Each participant possesses a unique profile of traits and response styles, which contributes to the diversity of answers and reduces the uniformity of the measured construct.

Statistical analysis included:

- correlation analysis between emotional intelligence level and grade point average;
- analysis of the impact of academic year on the level of emotional intelligence level (ANOVA);
- analysis of the impact of gender on the level of Emotional intelligence (ANOVA).

4. Results

In the first stage of research, the basic variables statistics were described (Table 1). Among men, the average test score was 194.88, while among women it was 188.88, indicating similar levels of emotional intelligence between genders. The distributions of these results were characterized by mean and median values close to each other, confirming the symmetry of the distributions in both groups.

The range of values was slightly wider between women, but both sexes showed similar minimum and maximum values. Kurtosis values were negative, indicating that the distributions of both variables were more flattened than the normal distribution, showing a higher concentration of results around average values with limited occurrence of extreme results. Skewness parameters oscillated around zero, suggesting that there was no clear asymmetry and dominance of distributions close to normal, both in gender and academic year divisions.

Similar tendencies were observed in the case of the averages of the academic grade analysed. Male students achieved an average grade of 4.11, while female students obtained a higher average value of 4.27. In individual academic years, these values were very similar, indicating homogeneity of the studied group.

Table 1. Basic data of dependent variables

Group	Item	Average	Median	Min	Max	Kurtosis	Skewness
Dependent variable: Emotional intelligence test result							
Men	17	194,88	195	155	228	–0,7	–0,09
Women	24	188,88	190	150	240	–0,87	0,24
Year I of study	22	192,14	192	150	240	–0,90	0,02
Year II of study	19	190,47	190	153	237	–0,67	0,13
Dependent variable: Average grades obtained							
Men	17	4,11	4	3,5	4,5	–0,6	–0,41
Women	24	4,27	4,25	3,75	4,95	–0,93	0,41
Year I of study	22	4,19	4,12	3,61	4,95	–0,39	0,58
Year II of study	19	4,22	4,20	3,50	4,70	–0,29	–0,39

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The distribution of emotional intelligence test scores by gender and academic year is illustrated simultaneously in Figures 3 and 4.

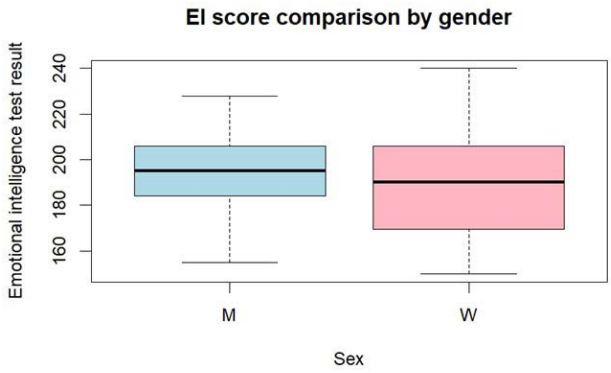

Figure 3. Box plot comparing the distribution of emotional intelligence test scores between male and female students

S o u r c e: Authors' own elaboration.

Figure 5 illustrates the correlation between emotional intelligence test scores and average student grades. This visualization allows for a visual assessment of the potential relationship between the two variables, indicating whether emotional intelligence may have an association with academic performance.

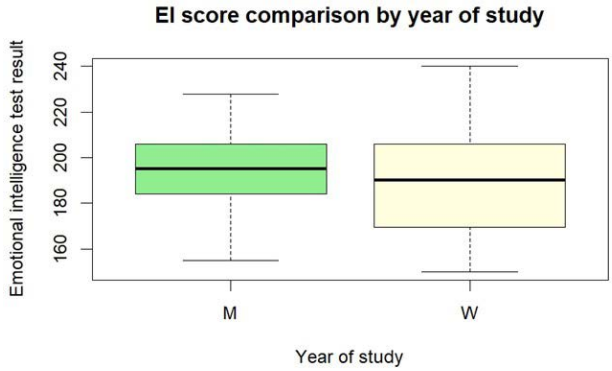

Figure 4. Boxplot comparing emotional intelligence test scores among first- and second-year students

S o u r c e: Authors' own elaboration.

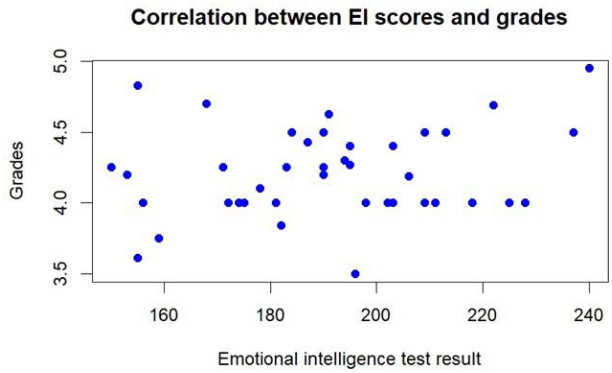

Figure 5. Scatterplot showing the correlation between emotional intelligence test scores and average grades

S o u r c e: Authors' own elaboration.

Pearson's linear correlation analysis between the results of the emotional intelligence test and the average grade point yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.212$ (95% CI: , 0.49), with a p-value = 0.183. The coefficient of determination (r^2) is 0.045, meaning that approximately 4.5% of the variance in academic performance can be explained by emotional intelligence scores. This indicates a weak positive correlation between emotional intelligence test results and the grade-point average. Although higher test scores are slightly associated with higher grade averages, this is not a strong relationship. The p-value indicates that there are no statistically significant grounds for rejecting the null hypothesis of no correlation.

Analysis of the impact of academic year on emotional intelligence level and the impact of gender on the level of emotional intelligence required, in the first stage, the execution of the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality of distribution (Table 2). In the case of gender, in both

instances the *p*-value significantly exceeds 0.05, so in both groups we can treat the distribution of emotional intelligence test results as normal. An identical situation occurs in the case of an academic year.

Table 2. Results of the Shapiro-Wilk

Group	W	*p*-value
Dependent variable: Emotional intelligence test result		
Men	0,984	0,984
Women	0,965	0,553
Year I of study	0,972	0,747
Year I of study	0,985	0,985

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Bartlett's test results indicated that variances of emotional intelligence test results are equal between groups (both gender and academic year), with *p*-values of 0.243 and 0.550 respectively (Table 3).

Table 3. Bartlett test results

Dependent variable	F	*p*-value
Emotional intelligence test results by gender	1,364	0,243
Emotional intelligence test result from the year of study	0,357	0,550

S o u r c e: Authors' own elaboration.

Given the satisfaction of basic ANOVA assumptions, parametric ANOVA tests were applied (Table 4). Both analyses yielded *p*-values greater than 0.05 (0.419 for gender and 0.822 for academic year), confirming the accepted research hypotheses. This means that the distribution of emotional intelligence test results among Business Development Strategies students is the same regardless of gender and academic year.

Table 4. Results of the Kruskal-Wallis rank

Dependent variable	F	*p*-value
Emotional intelligence test results by gender	0,668	0,419
Emotional intelligence test result from the year of study	0,052	0,822

S o u r c e: Authors' own elaboration.

This study adds to evidence that emotional intelligence is modestly associated with academic performance in higher education. No significant gender or academic year differences were found, suggesting that emotional intelligence development may depend more on intentional

interventions than natural progression. The study also highlights limitations of self-report measures, which can be affected by bias, and recommends cautious interpretation of results.

Numerous empirical studies within academic populations consistently report no significant overall gender differences in emotional intelligence (EI) (Sk & Halder, 2020; Galanakis et al., 2021; Ayoub et al., 2022; Bitar et al., 2023). While some investigations note minor sex-related variations in specific EI subdomains such as emotional stability or self-motivation, these nuances do not translate into meaningful disparities in global EI scores (Wakde, 2021; Ubago-Jiménez et al., 2024).

Regarding academic tenure and age, the evidence suggests that years of teaching or study experience do not exert a significant influence on EI levels among learners or instructors (Galanakis et al., 2021; Bitar et al., 2023). A subset of research indicates a marginal elevation in EI among older students or those further along in their studies; however, these effects are typically small and lack consistent statistical significance (Bitar et al., 2023). This pattern suggests that the development of EI is more heavily contingent on individual, social, and environmental factors than on academic seniority or chronological age alone (Galanakis et al., 2021; Bitar et al., 2023).

Several methodological limitations warrant careful consideration when interpreting these findings. First, the limited sample size substantially constrains statistical power. Consequently, the non-significant findings should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of no relationship, but rather as inconclusive given insufficient power to detect small-to-moderate effects.

Second, the convenience sampling approach from a single academic program at one university severely limits external validity and generalizability. The sample's homogeneity—comprising exclusively business students at one Polish institution—precludes extrapolation to broader student populations across different disciplines, institutions, or national contexts. Cultural, institutional, and program-specific factors may significantly influence both emotional intelligence levels and their relationships with academic outcomes.

Third, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference and fails to capture dynamic developmental processes. Emotional intelligence and academic performance were measured at a single time point, preventing examination of temporal precedence, reciprocal relationships, or longitudinal trajectories. Longitudinal designs tracking students across multiple years would provide stronger evidence regarding the directionality and stability of observed relationships.

Fourth, reliance on self-report measures introduces multiple sources of potential bias, including social desirability responding, reference bias, and limited correspondence with objective emotional abilities. Research demonstrates that self-report emotional intelligence assessments are susceptible to intentional distortion (faking good) and may reflect individuals' emotional self-concepts rather than actual emotional competencies. Furthermore, reference bias - whereby individuals' self-ratings are influenced by implicit social comparisons within their reference groups - can systematically distort mean differences across contexts. Future research should incorporate multi-method assessment strategies, including ability-based

emotional intelligence tests, behavioural observations, and peer or instructor ratings, to triangulate findings and mitigate single-method bias.

Finally, potential confounding variables—including prior academic preparation, socioeconomic status, motivation, personality traits, cognitive abilities, family support, and institutional resources—were not controlled in the analyses. These unmeasured variables could account for observed associations or suppress true relationships, thereby threatening internal validity. Future investigations should employ multivariate analytic approaches that statistically control for relevant covariates to isolate the unique contribution of emotional intelligence to academic outcomes.

However, the implications of emotional intelligence extend far beyond student performance alone. In the educational context, the personality and emotional competencies of teachers play a critical role in shaping the learning environment. Emotional intelligence enables educators to connect meaningfully with students, effectively manage classroom dynamics, and foster an environment conducive to learning and personal growth. Particular attention is drawn to studies of the influence of the emotional intelligence of the teacher on the success of his/her work.

According to research by Yashkova, the key aspects of emotional intelligence in teaching are (Yashkova et al., 2024; Gokhale, 2024):

1. Self-awareness: a teacher with a high level of self-awareness is able to recognize their emotions and understand how they affect their behaviour and interaction with students.
2. Self-regulation: the ability to control your emotions and respond adequately to stressful situations.
3. Empathy: emotional intelligence includes the ability to understand and feel the emotions of others. A teacher with empathy can better support their students, recognize their needs and problems, which helps create a trusting atmosphere in the classroom.
4. Social skills: emotional intelligence helps a teacher effectively interact with students, colleagues, and parents. The ability to establish contacts, resolve conflicts, and work as a team helps create a positive educational environment.
5. Motivation: teachers with a high level of emotional intelligence are able to inspire and motivate their students, creating an interest in learning and supporting their desire for success.
6. Creating a positive atmosphere: Emotional intelligence helps the teacher create a comfortable and supportive atmosphere in the classroom, which contributes to better learning and student development.

5. Conclusions

The research conducted confirms the significant role of emotional intelligence in academic settings, although it did not demonstrate statistically significant differences in levels of emotional intelligence between students of different sex or academic years in the Business Development Strategies program. Results indicate a moderate, though statistically insignificant, positive

relationship between emotional intelligence levels and academic performance, suggesting the need for further in-depth research.

However, these results underscore the potential to develop emotional competencies as an element that supports teaching and learning effectiveness. Therefore, it is recommended that higher education institutions systematically introduce programs that develop emotional intelligence among both students and teaching staff. Practical actions can include organizing workshops, training sessions, and integrating topics related to self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills into curriculum. Such approaches may contribute to building more supportive and engaging educational environments that promote better stress management, improved cooperation, and increased academic success.

However, certain study limitations should be taken into account. The sample included 41 students from one program at one university, limiting the generalizability of the results to broader academic populations. Moreover, using self-report questionnaires, though standardized, carries the risk of subjective response distortions. Future research should increase sample size and diversity, introduce mixed methods (e.g., observations, interviews), and apply longitudinal approaches to better capture emotional intelligence development dynamics and long-term impact on academic achievement.

In summary, emotional intelligence represents a key development area in higher education whose promotion can bring measurable benefits to students and institutions. Developing effective educational strategies and conducting broadly-based, multiaspect research will enable better understanding of emotional intelligence impact mechanisms and their utilization to improve education quality and academic climate.

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Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł bada znaczenie inteligencji emocjonalnej w szkolnictwie wyższym, analizując jej kluczowe kompetencje oraz rolę w procesach edukacyjnych. W kontekście szybkiego rozwoju technologicznego i transformacji rynku pracy inteligencja emocjonalna staje się coraz bardziej ceniona w zawodach, które nie mogą być łatwo zautomatyzowane. Badanie przedstawia empiryczne analizy przeprowadzone wśród 41 studentów pierwszego i drugiego roku kierunku Strategie Rozwoju Biznesu na Uniwersytecie Ekonomicznym w Krakowie. Wykorzystując standaryzowany kwestionariusz TEIQue-SF, badanie analizowało poziom inteligencji emocjonalnej oraz jej związek z wynikami akademickimi w podziale na płeć i rok studiów. Analiza statystyczna obejmowała testy normalności (Shapiro-Wilk), testy jednorodności wariancji (Bartlett), ANOVA oraz analizę korelacji Pearsona. Wyniki wskazują brak statystycznie istotnych różnic w poziomie inteligencji emocjonalnej między płciami oraz latami studiów, oraz słabą pozytywną korelację między inteligencją emocjonalną a średnią ocen. Rezultaty podkreślają potencjał rozwoju kompetencji emocjonalnych jako elementu wspierającego efektywność nauczania i uczenia się. Badanie rekomenduje systematyczne włączenie programów rozwoju inteligencji emocjonalnej do programów studiów wyższych oraz sugeruje przyszłe kierunki badań, w tym badania longitudinalne i podejścia mieszane w celu lepszego zrozumienia wpływu inteligencji emocjonalnej na sukces akademicki.

Słowa kluczowe

inteligencja emocjonalna, szkolnictwo wyższe, wyniki akademickie, rozwój studenta, kwestionariusz TEIQue-SF