

## How Counselling Services Foster Emotional Intelligence among University Students: Evidence from a Mixed-Methods Study in an Islamic Higher Education Context

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### Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a key competency supporting students' psychological well-being, academic engagement, and interpersonal functioning in higher education. However, most EI intervention studies rely on Western-based models and offer limited explanations of how cultural and spiritual values shape EI development. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the effectiveness of an Islamic EI-oriented counseling framework that integrates Islamic spiritual values into conventional EI models. This framework complements existing EI dimensions by embedding values such as *sabr* (patience), *tawakal* (trust in God), and self-reflection as mechanisms that strengthen emotional awareness, regulation, and empathy. Using a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, quantitative data were collected from 123 students at an Islamic university in Indonesia through a one-group pretest-posttest design, followed by qualitative interviews with students and counselors. Paired-sample *t*-test results revealed a statistically significant increase in EI scores after the intervention ( $p < 0.001$ ) with an exceptionally large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 2.68$ ), indicating a substantial and practically meaningful impact. Qualitative findings further elucidate the mechanism of change, showing that Islamic spiritual meaning-making functions as a catalyst for sustained emotional regulation, empathy, and prosocial behavior. Theoretically, these findings challenge assumptions about the universality of Western EI models and demonstrate the importance of culturally and spiritually grounded counseling frameworks for fostering deep, transformative EI development in higher education contexts.

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, counseling services, higher education, mixed methods, islamic education

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## INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence (EI) has long been positioned as a key psychological competency in individual development, encompassing the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others, motivate oneself, show empathy, and build adaptive interpersonal relationships (Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Drigas et al., 2023; Salameh-Ayanian et al., 2025). Various studies show that EI is positively correlated with academic success, psychological well-being, and the quality of social interactions (Brackett et al., 2011; Zeidner et al., 2012; Năstasă et al., 2022; Hidalgo-Fuentes et al., 2024). In the context of higher education, EI plays an increasingly important role as students face more complex academic and social demands (Qualter et al., 2012; Khassawneh et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).

However, the development of EI literature has also been accompanied by empirical findings that are not entirely consistent. A number of studies report a strong relationship between EI and academic performance and psychological well-being, while other studies show a moderate or context-dependent effect, depending on research design, measurement instruments, and sample characteristics (Zeidner et al., 2012; MacCann et al., 2020). More recent studies further indicate that the effectiveness of EI may vary across cultural contexts, particularly between individualistic and collectivist societies, suggesting that EI functions are shaped not only by individual traits but also by social norms and value systems (Dolev & Leshem, 2017; Mohamed et al., 2025). This inconsistency raises fundamental scientific questions, not only about the extent of EI's role but also about how, and through what mechanisms, emotional intelligence can be developed through intervention.

The main criticism of EI research lies in the dominance of correlational designs and quantitative approaches, which tend to answer the question of whether EI is related to certain outcomes but are limited in explaining the process of EI change in depth (Mayer et al., 2008; Hodzic et al., 2018; Brown, 2024). Even in intervention-based studies, the effectiveness of EI training especially short-term interventions, remains debated, particularly in relation to the sustainability of emotional competencies and their transfer to real-life contexts (Nelis et al., 2011; Schutte et al., 2013; Launer & Calimag, 2025). Recent meta-analyses and longitudinal studies (2022-2025) emphasize the need for context-sensitive and process-oriented EI interventions to ensure meaningful and lasting impact, especially in educational settings (MacCann et al., 2020 ; Mohamed et al., 2025).

Within guidance and counseling services in higher education, EI is often assumed to support counseling effectiveness, yet its role is rarely conceptualized as an explicit developmental target. Most studies still position EI as a universal and culturally neutral individual competency, without sufficiently considering the influence of values, spirituality, and meaning-making frameworks that shape how individuals interpret and regulate emotions (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2016; Mayer et al., 2016). Critiques of the universality of Western-dominated EI models including those proposed by Goleman and Mayer-Salovey, suggest that emotional construction and regulation are deeply embedded in cultural and religious contexts (Zeidner et al., 2012; Dolev & Leshem, 2017).

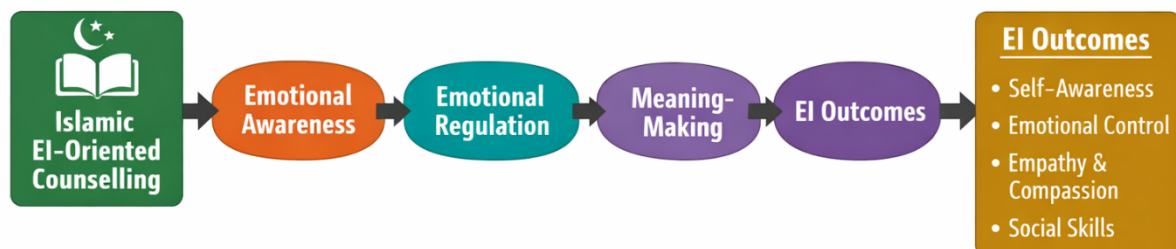
These limitations become more pronounced in the context of Islamic higher education. Most EI models and interventions were developed within secular and individualistic paradigms that emphasize personal self-control and emotional autonomy. In contrast, within Islamic educational traditions, emotional regulation is understood not merely as a psychological skill but as a reflective and ethical practice grounded in spiritual



values such as *sabr* (patience), *ikhlas* (sincerity), *muhasabah* (self-reflection), and *tawakal* (trust in God) (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Dolev & Leshem, 2017). Recent studies in Islamic education and Muslim student development (2022-2025) highlight that emotional awareness and regulation are closely linked to spiritual meaning-making and relational responsibility, yet these dimensions remain under-integrated in mainstream EI research and counseling practice.

Methodologically, mixed-methods approaches are increasingly recommended to address the complexity of emotional intelligence as a multidimensional construct. However, in EI research, mixed methods are often implemented in a procedural manner, where quantitative and qualitative data are combined without theoretical integration to explain mechanisms of change (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Kotsou et al., 2019). As a result, many studies contribute methodological variation without offering substantive theoretical models that explain how EI develops through intervention within specific cultural or spiritual contexts.

In response to these conceptual and methodological gaps, this study proposes an Islamic EI-Oriented Counseling Model as a framework for understanding and facilitating the development of emotional intelligence in Islamic higher education. In this model, guidance and counseling services are conceptualized as structured EI-oriented interventions that intentionally integrate emotional skill development with Islamic value-based reflection. As illustrated in Figure 1, Islamic EI-oriented counseling serves as the entry point for increasing emotional awareness, which subsequently supports adaptive emotional regulation. This process is deepened by a meaning-making stage, in which emotional experiences are interpreted through Islamic values, serving as a key mechanism linking emotional awareness to sustainable behavioral and interpersonal change. The expected outcomes of this process include enhanced self-awareness, emotional control, empathy, and social skills.



**Figure 1.** Islamic EI-Oriented Counseling Model

Thus, Figure 1 represents the central conceptual contribution of this study by expanding existing EI frameworks by integrating psychological mechanisms and Islamic value dimensions into counseling services. This model emphasizes that the development of emotional intelligence is determined not solely by counseling techniques or intervention duration, but also by the interpretive framework through which individuals understand and regulate their emotions. This perspective distinguishes the present study from previous EI research that is largely correlational, Western-centric, and limited in its explanation of the contextual processes underlying EI change. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) examine the effectiveness of Islamic EI-oriented guidance and counseling services in improving students' emotional intelligence scores, and (2) explore the mechanisms of the process of emotional intelligence change through the lens of Islamic values as experienced by students participating in the counseling process.



## METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, in which quantitative data collection and analysis were conducted first, followed by qualitative data collection to explain and deepen the quantitative findings (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). This design was chosen to address the complexity of emotional intelligence (EI) development, which involves both measurable outcomes and subjective emotional processes that require contextual interpretation.

The study was conducted at the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program (Bimbingan dan Penyuluhan Islam/BPI), UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. Participants consisted of 123 active undergraduate students selected through purposive sampling, based on cohort representation and willingness to participate in all research stages (Creswell, 2014; Etikan et al., 2016). Most participants were in early adulthood, a developmental phase closely related to emotional regulation and identity formation (Arnett, 2023; Field, 2018). Differences in educational background were considered relevant, as they may influence emotional learning and social skills (Hair et al., 2019).

**Table 1.**  
Research Sample Distribution

Generation	Number (n)	Male	Female	Percentage (%)
2022	34	14	20	27,6
2023	32	13	19	26,0
2024	30	11	19	24,4
2025	27	9	18	22,0
Total	123	47	76	100

In the quantitative phase, a one-group pretest-posttest design was used as an exploratory quasi-intervention approach. Emotional intelligence was measured before and after students participated in structured guidance and counseling services oriented toward EI development. This design allowed for the identification of within-group changes while acknowledging potential limitations related to maturation and retest effects (Nelis et al., 2011; Schutte et al., 2013). The intervention consisted of six structured Islamic EI-oriented counseling sessions, conducted weekly, with each session lasting approximately 90 minutes. The counseling program integrated EI psychoeducation based on the Goleman and Mayer-Salovey frameworks with Islamic value-based reflection. Core activities included developing emotional self-awareness through *muhasabah* (self-reflection), emotion regulation training framed by values such as *sabr* (patience), *tawakal* (trust in God), and *ikhlas* (sincerity), as well as enhancing empathy and social skills through role-playing and case discussions. Each session concluded with a guided meaning-making reflection to connect emotional experiences with Islamic ethical values, in line with the Islamic EI-Oriented Counseling Model proposed in this study.

Emotional intelligence was measured using a self-report EI scale developed from Goleman's model and the Mayer-Salovey framework. The instrument consisted of 40 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, equally distributed across four dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. Instrument validity was assessed using item total correlation, and internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (Hair et al., 2019; Taber, 2018).



**Table 2.**  
Dimensions and Reliability of the Emotional Intelligence Scale

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
Self-awareness	10	0.86
Self-regulation	10	0.88
Empathy	10	0.85
Social skills	10	0.87
Overall EI	40	0.91

All subscales demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency ( $\alpha > 0.80$ ), and the overall scale showed excellent reliability, indicating that the instrument is suitable for assessing emotional intelligence in this study context. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize pretest and posttest EI scores, followed by paired-sample *t*-tests to examine differences before and after the intervention (Field, 2018). Effect size estimates and confidence intervals were calculated to strengthen interpretation. Pearson correlation and simple linear regression analyses were conducted exploratively to describe associations between participation in counseling services and changes in EI scores, without implying causal relationships.

The qualitative phase was conducted after the quantitative analysis to explain the observed changes in EI scores. Informants were selected purposively to represent different cohorts and levels of EI change. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45-60 minutes with three students and one counselor. Interviews focused on emotional experiences, perceived changes, and the role of Islamic values in emotion regulation. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006) the procedures. Coding was conducted independently by two researchers, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion to reach consensus. NVivo software was used to assist data management and coding.

Quantitative and qualitative data integration is carried out during the results interpretation stage. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data occurred at the interpretation stage. Qualitative findings were used to explain specific quantitative results, for example by illustrating how improvements in emotion regulation scores were supported by students' narratives describing the application of *sabr* and *tawakal* in managing academic stress. This integration strengthened the explanatory power of the findings through methodological triangulation. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the institutional ethics committee. All participants provided informed consent, confidentiality was assured, and data were securely stored and used solely for research purposes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

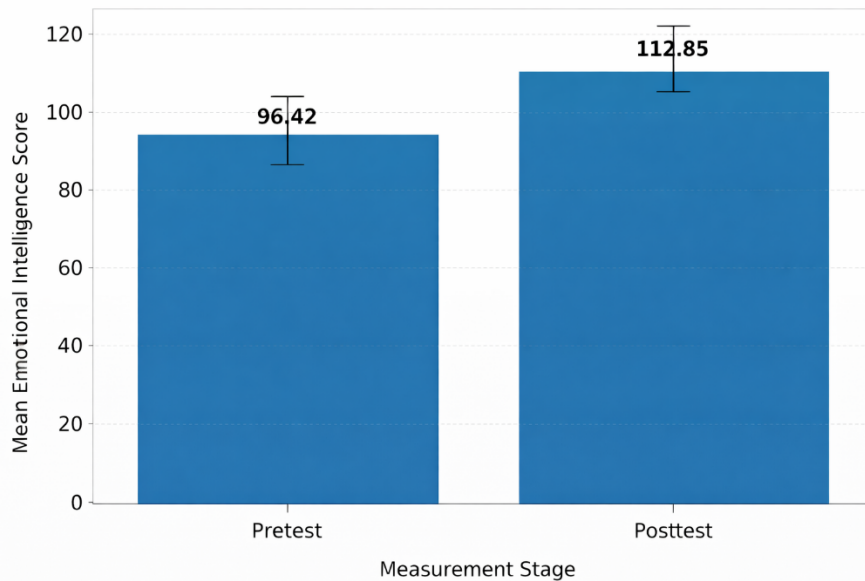
A quantitative analysis was conducted on 123 students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program (BPI) at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin using a one-group pretest–posttest design. This analysis aimed to assess changes in students' emotional intelligence following participation in guidance and counseling services. Descriptive statistical analysis of emotional intelligence scores before and after participation in counseling services is presented in Table 3.



**Table 3.**  
 Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence Scores on the Pretest and Posttest

Measurement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	123	96.42	8.37
Posttest	123	112.85	7.91

Table 3 shows that the average emotional intelligence score at the pretest stage was 96.42 (SD = 8.37). After participating in guidance and counseling services, the average score increased to 112.85 (SD = 7.91). The mean increase between the two measurements was 16.43 points. To strengthen the visual interpretation of the statistical difference, Figure 1 presents a bar chart comparing pretest and posttest mean scores with standard deviation error bars.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Emotional Intelligence Scores

As shown in Figure 1, the increase from the pretest to the posttest stage is visually substantial. The separation of error bars further supports the magnitude of the improvement. To determine whether this difference was statistically significant, a paired-sample t-test was conducted, as presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.**  
 Results of the Paired Sample t-Test for Emotional Intelligence Scores

Comparison	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest-Posttest	-16.43	6.12	-29.47	122	0.000

The paired-sample t-test yielded a t-value of -29.47 with a significance value of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest emotional intelligence scores. The magnitude of change was exceptionally large (Cohen's  $d = 2.68$ ), demonstrating a highly substantial practical effect of Islamic EI-oriented counseling on students' emotional intelligence. To further examine the association between participation in guidance and counseling services and emotional intelligence scores, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted, as presented in Table 5.



**Table 5.**  
 Pearson Correlation between Guidance and Counseling Services and Emotional Intelligence

Variabel	r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Guidance and Counseling Services - Emotional Intelligence	0.671	0.000

The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.671 ( $p = 0.000$ ) indicates a positive association between participation in counseling services and emotional intelligence scores. A simple linear regression analysis was subsequently performed to examine the statistical contribution of counseling services to emotional intelligence scores. The results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.**  
 Simple Linear Regression Analysis Results

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	58.214	4.982	-	11.68	0.000
Guidance and Counseling Services	0.812	0.067	0.671	12.12	0.000

The regression coefficient for guidance and counseling services was 0.812 with a significance value of 0.000, indicating a statistically significant linear association. The overall regression model summary is presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.**  
 Regression Analysis Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.671	0.450	0.445	6.28

The R Square value of 0.450 indicates that 45% of the variance in emotional intelligence scores is statistically associated with variation in participation in guidance and counseling services.

To explore the students' experiences underlying these score changes, in-depth interviews were conducted with four purposively selected informants: three students from different cohorts (2022, 2023, and 2024) and one academic advisor/counselor directly involved in implementing the counseling services. Thematic analysis identified three main themes representing patterns of emotional transformation, as summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8.**  
 Qualitative Findings Themes and Subthemes

Main Theme	Subthemes	Empirical Indications
Self-awareness	Self-emotional reflection	Awareness of personal feelings and emotional triggers
Emotion regulation	Negative emotion control	Ability to calm oneself, manage anxiety, and academic stress
Empathy & social skills	Understanding other people's emotions	More adaptive and collaborative social interactions

The first theme, self-awareness, reflects students' increased capacity to recognize their emotional states and identify triggers that previously led to impulsive reactions. A student from the class of 2022 (Informant A) stated,



“Before participating in counseling, I was easily provoked, especially when I had a lot of assignments. After several counseling sessions, I became more aware of my own feelings and was able to control my reactions.”

This statement illustrates how counseling services contributed to the development of students’ self-awareness. The interview findings indicate that participants became more capable of identifying stress triggers particularly academic pressure, that had previously resulted in impulsive responses. Through the counseling process, they developed a more reflective attitude toward their emotions and were better able to regulate their reactions rationally. These findings confirm that enhanced self-awareness serves as a foundational step toward strengthening emotional regulation and fostering greater behavioral maturity among students.

The second theme, emotion regulation, concerns students’ ability to manage negative emotions, particularly anxiety and academic stress. A student from the class of 2024 (Informant C) explained,

“I used to be overly anxious. Through counseling services, I learned to recognize my emotions and calm them. Now I am more focused and confident.”

This testimony demonstrates that counseling services played a significant role in improving students’ emotional regulation skills. Participants reported a noticeable decrease in academic anxiety and an increased ability to recognize and manage negative emotions effectively. These improvements were reflected in enhanced concentration in learning activities and stronger self-confidence. Thus, counseling services function not merely as a supportive mechanism but also as a transformative process that strengthens students’ emotional stability.

The third theme, empathy and social skills, reflects changes in interpersonal sensitivity and communication patterns. A student from the class of 2023 (Informant B) emphasized,

“The most noticeable change was in empathy. I became better able to understand my friends' feelings and not judge them immediately.”

The interview findings reveal that counseling services contributed to the development of empathy and interpersonal awareness. Participants experienced positive changes in their social interaction patterns, becoming more understanding of others’ emotions and less inclined to make immediate judgments. These changes indicate increased social maturity and the emergence of more inclusive, reflective, and constructive communication skills.

These patterns were further confirmed by the academic advisor/counselor (Informant D), who stated,

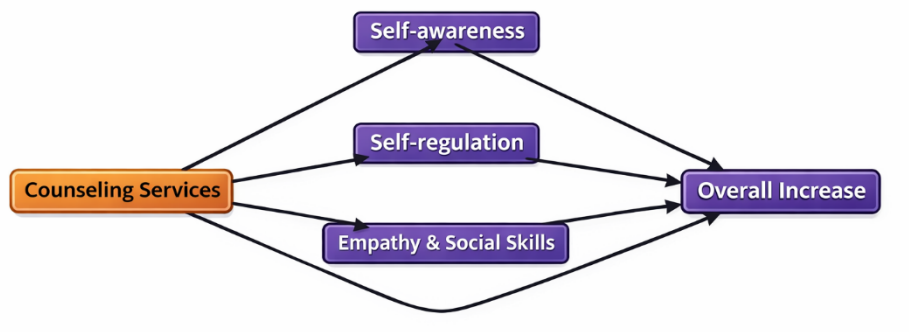
“Changes in students are evident in the way they communicate. They are more open, more reflective, and able to express their emotions in a healthy way compared to before the service was provided.”

From the counselor’s perspective, students’ transformation is clearly observable in their communication styles and emotional expression. They have become more open, more reflective, and better able to manage their emotions in a healthy manner. Taken together, these findings consistently demonstrate that counseling services have a positive



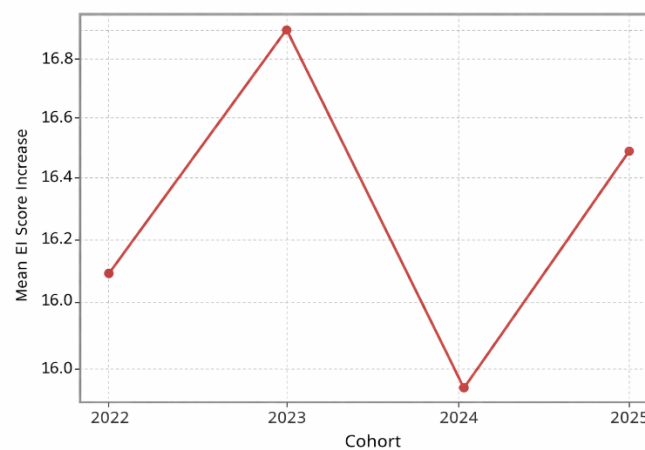
and observable impact, as evidenced by both students' subjective experiences and professional observations by academic advisors.

The integration of quantitative results and qualitative findings is visually summarized in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Integrated Mixed-Methods Model of Emotional Intelligence Improvement

The model illustrates how counseling services contributed to improvements in self-awareness, emotion regulation, and empathy/social skills, which collectively explain the statistically significant increase in overall emotional intelligence scores. The distribution of the EI score across cohorts is presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Distribution of Mean EI Score Increase by Cohort (2022-2025)

The visualization indicates relatively consistent improvements across cohorts, suggesting that the counseling intervention produced stable effects across different academic generations.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic EI-oriented guidance and counseling services are associated with a statistically significant increase in students' emotional intelligence scores. Quantitative results demonstrate a substantial mean improvement from pretest to posttest (Table 3), supported by a highly significant paired-sample *t*-test (Table 4). The magnitude of this change, further reflected in the exceptionally large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 2.68$ ), reinforces evidence from intervention-based research that emotional intelligence is not a fixed trait but can be meaningfully



developed through structured training and reflective processes (Goleman, 2001; Mayer et al., 2008; Nelis et al., 2011; Schutte et al., 2013). In addition, the correlation ( $r = 0.671$ ) and regression findings ( $R^2 = 0.450$ ) indicate a strong positive association between participation in guidance and counseling services and emotional intelligence outcomes, consistent with meta-analytic evidence supporting the effectiveness of EI-focused interventions (Hodzic et al., 2018; MacCann et al., 2020).

Notably, the observed effect size (Cohen's  $d = 2.68$ ) is substantially higher than those typically reported in meta-analyses of emotional intelligence interventions, indicating an exceptionally strong practical impact and suggesting that spiritually integrated counseling may function as a powerful amplification mechanism for emotional development. However, beyond demonstrating effectiveness, the central theoretical question concerns why and how the Islamic EI-oriented framework produces such changes. To deepen the explanatory power of these findings, three additional perspectives are integrated: emotional schema theory, cultural-psychological critiques of EI universality, and religious coping theory.

#### Emotional Schema Transformation: From Threat to Spiritual Meaning

While mainstream EI theory conceptualizes emotional regulation as the ability to monitor and manage affective states (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer et al., 2016), emotional schema theory suggests that distress arises primarily from the meanings individuals attach to their emotions rather than from the emotions themselves. Anxiety, frustration, and sadness become maladaptive when interpreted as threats, personal failures, or indicators of incompetence. This interpretive dimension is especially salient during emerging adulthood, a developmental stage marked by identity exploration and instability (Arnett, 2023). University students navigating academic demands are therefore particularly vulnerable to stress-related reinterpretations (Zhang et al., 2024; Mohamed et al., 2025).

The findings indicate that the Islamic counseling framework facilitated not merely surface-level regulation but a transformation of emotional meaning. Practices such as *muhasabah* (self-reflection), *sabr* (patience), and *tawakal* (trust in God) served as structured cognitive and spiritual reappraisals. Students who initially framed academic stress as evidence of inadequacy began to reinterpret it as a divine "test" or developmental process. This reframing aligns with evidence that emotional competence interventions reduce maladaptive secondary responses (Nelis et al., 2011; Kotsou et al., 2019). However, unlike secular performance-based reframing, the reinterpretation here embedded stress within a transcendent moral narrative.

Empirical literature consistently links emotional intelligence to lower depression and higher well-being (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2016; Năstasă et al., 2022) Nasir et al., 2023; Hidalgo-Fuentes et al., 2024) and to academic success (Qualter et al., 2012; MacCann et al., 2020; Halimi et al., 2021). The present findings resonate with research on positive emotional climates in preventing academic stress (Alvanajati et al., 2025) and the impact of positive verbal framing on emotional health (Fitriani & Surawan, 2025). Thus, the improvement observed may reflect a dual mechanism: enhancement of regulatory ability (Goleman, 1995; Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer et al., 2016) and restructuring of emotional schemas through value-integrated reinterpretation (Maddocks, 2023).

Importantly, this mechanism suggests that emotional growth in Islamic higher education contexts involves attitudinal reorientation rather than purely technical skill



acquisition. The shift from perceiving stress as “threat” to understanding it as “spiritual growth” reduces shame and rumination while strengthening purpose-driven resilience.

#### Rethinking EI as Culturally Embedded, Not Universal

Dominant EI models often assume universality in emotional processing (Zeidner et al., 2012; Mayer et al., 2016). Yet cultural psychology argues that emotions are embedded within relational norms, moral systems, and collective identities. Emotional expression and regulation are culturally mediated practices rather than isolated cognitive skills.

The empathy and social skill improvements observed in this study appear to be relationally anchored in Islamic concepts such as *ukhuwah*, communal responsibility, and moral accountability. Students described empathy not merely as perspective-taking ability but as ethical obligation grounded in shared faith identity. This interpretation aligns with research demonstrating that emotional competence develops within institutional and cultural ecologies (Zeidner et al., 2012; Dolev & Leshem, 2017; Mohamed et al., 2025).

Relational culture scholarship further supports this reading. Studies show that intimate friendship strengthens religious character (Husniah et al., 2025) and that parental and relational support reinforce self-efficacy (Khasanah et al., 2025). Emotional openness in digital contexts also contributes to regulation and relational bonding (Norhidayah et al., 2026). Even contemporary “healing culture” among Gen Z reflects socially shaped emotion regulation practices (Thoyibah & Surawan, 2025).

These findings respond to critiques that EI research risks cultural reductionism when detached from socio-religious contexts (Zeidner et al., 2012). Emotional intelligence in Islamic higher education appears to harmonize personal affect with communal norms and spiritual accountability. Improvements in empathy and social competence, therefore, reflect reinforcement of collective moral orientation alongside individual skill development.

#### Religious Coping: Collaborative or Passive Mechanisms?

Religious coping theory distinguishes between collaborative coping, in which individuals actively work with God in problem-solving, and deferential coping, characterized by passive surrender. The qualitative narratives in this study suggest that emotional improvements align more closely with collaborative mechanisms. Students reported recognizing emotional states, engaging in reflective evaluation, and intentionally calming themselves while entrusting outcomes to God.

This coexistence of agency and faith indicates empowerment rather than avoidance. If emotional change had emerged primarily through passive surrender, reduced initiative or emotional disengagement might be expected. Instead, participants demonstrated increased confidence, openness in communication, and academic focus. These patterns are consistent with evidence that emotional intelligence predicts well-being when integrated with social and spiritual support (Hidalgo-Fuentes et al., 2024).

Meta-analytic research shows that EI training produces measurable but context-dependent improvements (Hodzic et al., 2018; Schutte et al., 2013). The present findings suggest that religious coping may function as an activating mechanism that enhances cognitive reappraisal and behavioral engagement. Emotional intelligence has been shown to predict performance across academic and professional settings (Khasawneh et al.,



2022; Drigas et al., 2023; Salameh-Ayanian et al., 2025; Launer & Calimag, 2025), yet its development remains multidetermined (Mayer et al., 2008).

Methodologically, the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Clark, 2018) enabled integration of quantitative findings with thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Statistical analysis adhered to multivariate principles (Field, 2018; Hair et al., 2019), and reliability considerations followed established guidelines (Taber, 2018). Although sampling strategies common in educational research may limit generalizability (Etikan et al., 2016), the  $R^2$  value of 0.450 indicates a meaningful explanatory contribution.

Overall, the findings suggest that emotional development in Islamic higher education contexts emerges through three interrelated processes: the transformation of emotional schemas, the cultural-collective anchoring of empathy, and the activation of collaborative religious coping. Emotional intelligence, therefore, is not merely an individual capacity but a morally and spiritually embedded developmental phenomenon.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Islamic EI-oriented guidance and counseling services produce statistically significant and exceptionally large improvements in students' emotional intelligence (Cohen's  $d = 2.68$ ) across self-awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, and social skills, with quantitative gains reinforced by qualitative evidence of reflective and relational transformation. Beyond confirming its effectiveness, this research makes a theoretical contribution through the concept of value-infused emotional regulation, a mechanism in which emotion regulation is activated by the spiritual interpretation of emotional experiences rather than relying solely on cognitive-psychological techniques. These findings challenge the implicit assumption of universality embedded in many Western emotional intelligence models, which often conceptualize emotional regulation as culturally neutral and primarily individualistic. In contrast, the results demonstrate that within Islamic higher education contexts, the development of self-awareness, empathy, and emotional control is closely intertwined with the internalization of spiritual values such as *sabr*, *tawakal*, and *muhasabah*. Consequently, this study suggests that emotional intelligence should be understood as culturally embedded and spiritually mediated rather than universally uniform across social contexts. By articulating this perspective, the present research opens the pathway for the development of contextual emotional intelligence models that integrate cultural, spiritual, and relational values into contemporary counseling and emotional intelligence theory.

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