

# Cultural Flexibility: Emotional Intelligence and College Students' Adaptation to Diversity

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## ABSTRACT

Establishing a harmonious relationship within a community of diverse culture requires understanding of both our own emotions and that of others. This research explores how emotional intelligence (EI) influence college students' ability to adapt to diverse cultures at Mindanao State University in Marawi City. From a total population of 14,855, this research randomly selected 375 students, and found a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and adaptability. Notably, students with higher emotional intelligence adopts better to diverse cultural environments. Interestingly, neither emotional intelligence nor adaptability were significantly influence by age and gender. However, ethnicity affected both emotional intelligence and adaptability while religion influenced emotional intelligence only. With these findings, the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence training and cultural awareness into university programs cannot be ignored in enhancing students' capacity for adaptation. It is important to note that nurturing emotionally intelligent and culturally adaptable individuals is essential for success in a richly diverse society.

**Keywords:** Cultural Flexibility, Emotional Intelligence, Adaptation to Diversity.

## INTRODUCTION

As social norms and interaction was continually reshaped by globalization, universities have also been increasingly becoming culturally diverse where students from different backgrounds converge to learn and develop. This phenomenon presents both opportunities and challenges for students as they embrace their new academic and social environments. An important factor in this process is emotional intelligence (EI), a vital skill set that allows individuals to identify, understand, and control their emotions, and those of others.

EI's key components which includes empathy, emotional regulation, social skills, and self-awareness, are crucial for building positive relationships and enabling effective communication in an environment with diverse culture. Students with high levels of emotional intelligence usually to have more social support and meaningful interactions with others as described by Lopez-Zafra et al. (2019), which in turn eases depressive feelings.

Mindanao State University – Main Campus (MSU-Main), as a diverse educational institution, evaluating the level of EI of the students is importance as it may influence their ability to adapt to the university's cultural diversity. Which are both necessary for their academic success and overall well-being. However, limited research has been conducted in the university related to this matter and this lack of cultural awareness significantly hampers inclusivity and understanding which leads to communication barriers, discrimination, and social isolation, among students from different backgrounds.

Understanding this connection can help the university foster more inclusive communities, support student well-being, and better prepare students to succeed despite the complexities of a globalized society

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## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Being able to effectively adapt and respond to the diverse world around us is crucial for both our personal growth and survival. EI, as defined by psychologists is about the capacity to recognize and manage one's own emotions and appropriately identify and respond to the emotions of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In academic context, students with higher emotional intelligence often do better academically, while those who struggle with managing their emotions may find it harder to cope (Afridi & Ali, 2019). This becomes even more important in environments where social factors like ethnicity, gender, social class, race, and sexual orientation, influenced student's experience (Miller, 2015). When there's a lack of awareness or sensitivity to diversity, it can create barriers to meaningful interactions among students from diverse backgrounds.

A significant knowledge gap exists regarding the specific context of Mindanao State University in Marawi City, where limited research has been carried out on the challenges and opportunities associated with emotional intelligence (EI) in this unique socio-cultural setting. Understanding the interaction between emotional intelligence and cultural factors specific to MSU-Marawi is essential for planning for interventions and support systems to address students' needs. Further research in this localized context would provide valuable insights into the factors influencing students' adaptation to diversity within the university's distinctive socio-cultural landscape.

The preceding discussion leads to the formulation of the following three foundational hypotheses.

**H1:** A significant relationship exists between respondents' emotional intelligence and demographic profile.

**H2:** A significant relationship exists between respondents' demographic profile and adaptability.

**H3:** A significant relationship exists between respondents' emotional intelligence and adaptability.

### Research Questions

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
  - 1.1 age;
  - 1.2 gender;
  - 1.3 religion;
  - 1.4 ethnicity; and
  - 1.5 college?
2. What is the level of emotional intelligence of the respondents in Mindanao State University?
3. What is the level of respondents' adaptability to the diverse culture of the university?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents and their level of emotional intelligence?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents and their level of adaptability to the university's diverse culture?
6. Is there a significant relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and adaptability of the respondents?

### General Objective

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the relationship between emotional intelligence and cultural adaptability among college students at Mindanao State University, Marawi City.

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## Specific Objective

The specific objective of this study are the following:

1. to assess the level of emotional intelligence of the college students in the Mindanao State University, Marawi City;
2. to assess the level of adaptability of the college students towards diverse culture in the Mindanao State University, Marawi City..

## Significance of the Study

The findings might have significant implications for various stakeholders.

For students, enhancing emotional intelligence and cultural adaptability can improve interpersonal skills and promote cohesion among diverse peers.

For parents, this study will also provide them with valuable idea to understand the role of emotional intelligence in their children's college experiences, empowering them to better support emotional development.

For educators, the findings can help identify the challenges students face in navigating cultural differences, facilitating the development of inclusive teaching strategies. additionally, the university can use the results to develop interventions and support systems to improve students' emotional well-being that may contribute to their academic success.

Lastly, this research may serve as a valuable point of reference for future research endeavor, inspiring further studies to enhance student's emotional intelligence and ability to adapt in diverse educational environments.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Emotional intelligence (EI) is recognized as a key factor assessing how people make decisions and build effective relationships. It has been pointed out that emotions are essential for the overall well-being of individuals (Damasio, 1999), and that EI is performing an important role in building relationships with other people (Andrews, 2019). Hussainy et al. (2022), referring to Goleman's EI model, which includes traits like self-awareness and empathy as integral components of personal and professional success. Metacognition, as described by Drigas and Mitsea (2021), relates to the ability to regulate one's emotional states and achieving self-awareness. Research shows that strong social support systems boost student's learning motivation and helps them manage stress effectively (Song et al., 2015; Camacho et al., 2021).

According to Earley and Ang (2003), cultural intelligence is defined as the ability to function well in a diverse social environment comprising four components: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral that facilitate understanding and adaptation to cultural differences (Ang et al., 2006). Miscommunication often arises from cultural misunderstandings, which can hinder effective interaction (Savolainen, 2016). Overall, the study underscores the importance of EI and cultural intelligence as it helps bridge gaps and supports clearer, more respectful communication across cultures.

As classrooms became more culturally diverse, educators are increasingly called to use teaching methods that acknowledge and respect differences in religion, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and more. According to Allport (1954), meaningful, goal-driven interactions among diverse groups can reduce prejudice and build unity. It was also found that greater understanding to ethnic diversity in schools contributes to lower rates of bullying and victimization, creating a more positive classroom environment (Graham, 2006).

This study examines how age, gender, religion, and ethnicity, and EI influence how well students adapt to the culturally diverse environment at the university settings.

Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale was employed to measure emotional intelligence of the respondents, composed of emotion recognition, self-regulation of emotions, regulation of others' emotions, and emotional expression. These are important factors to understand its impact on the college students' ability to adapt to the diverse cultural environment MSU-Main. To measure the students' cultural adaptability, the Cultural Intelligence Model (Dyne, Ang, & Koh, 2015), composed of metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects was used. Figure 1. Shows the Schematic Diagram of the Conceptual Framework of the study

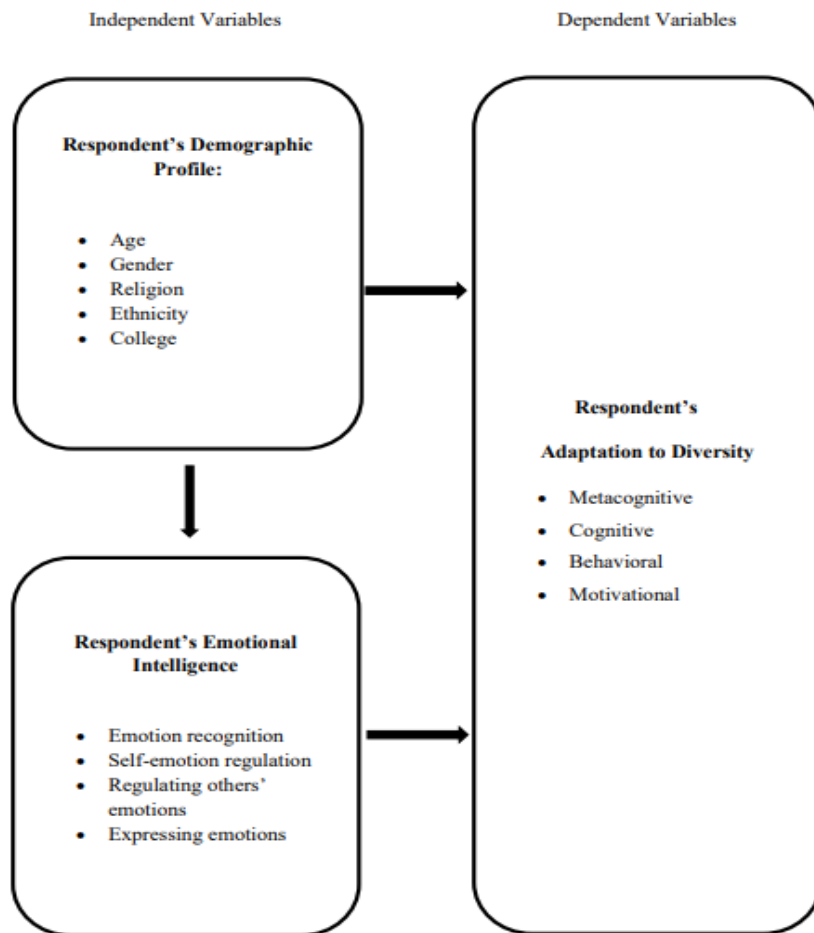


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram showing the Conceptual Framework of the study

## METHODOLOGY

This research used a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design to examine students' emotional intelligence and its relationship to their ability to adapt to the diverse culture at Mindanao State University-Marawi City (MSU-Main).

MSU-Main is a predominantly Muslim institution that caters students from various cultural and religious groups which is crucial for assessing students' EI and their ability to adapt within the university's diverse cultural setting. A sample size of 375 from a total student population of 14,855 was evaluated, maintaining a 95% confidence level and a  $\pm 5\%$  margin of error. The survey participants were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling method.

Data was gathered through a structured and validated survey composed of three sections: basic demographic details, emotional intelligence (measured using the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale), and cultural intelligence (determined using the Cultural Intelligence Scale developed by Earley & Ang, 2003). Once collected, the responses were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools to explore the connection between emotional intelligence and cultural adaptability.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Summary of Respondent's Level of Emotional Intelligence

Aspects of Emotional Intelligence	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation	Rank
Self-Emotion Regulation	5.37	1.46	Agree	
Regulating Others' Emotion	5.22	1.29	Slightly Agree	
Emotional Recognition	5.15	1.41	Slightly Agree	
Expressing Emotions	5.10	1.30	Slightly Agree	
AVERAGE	5.21	1.37	Slightly Agree	

Table 1 presents the average scores and standard deviations for each aspect of emotional intelligence among the respondents. Among the four dimensions, expressing emotions received the lowest average score of 5.10, indicating that students generally agreed with the related statements, but to a lesser extent. On the other hand, self-emotion regulation scored the highest, with a mean of 5.37, reflecting a slightly stronger agreement. Overall, the respondents showed a moderately positive level of emotional intelligence, with an average score of 5.21.

This finding aligns with the work of Petrides and Furnham (2000), who stressed that having high emotional intelligence is a better predicts healthy psychological adjustment than even high self-esteem while low emotional intelligence has been closely linked to issues like depression and risky behaviors.

Table 2. Summary of Respondents' Adaptation to Diversity

Aspects of Emotional Intelligence	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation	Rank
Metacognitive	5.67	1.08	Agree	1
Behavioral	5.38	1.26	Agree	2
Motivational	5.37	1.26	Agree	3
Cognitive	4.49	1.40	Slightly Agree	4
AVERAGE	5.23	1.25	Slightly Agree	

Table 2 shows the average scores and standard deviations for different aspects of emotional intelligence. Among them, the cognitive aspect received the lowest average rating of 4.49, while the metacognitive aspect scored the highest with an average of 5.67. This finding echoes the work of Roberts (2005), who highlighted how important it is to make sense of situations and remain flexible in diverse environments. It also aligns with Caldwell and O'Reilly (1982), who pointed out that people who can adapt to and stay aware of their surroundings tend to perform better in roles that involve interacting with diverse groups.

Table 3. Relationship between Respondents' Profile and their Level of Emotional Intelligence

Demographic Profile	Level of Emotional Intelligence		
	$\chi^2$	p-value	Interpretation
Age	16.3	0.061	Not significant
Gender	6.02	0.111	Not significant
Religion	51.7	<0.001	Significant
Ethnicity	62.2	0.004	Significant
College	78.0	<0.001	Significant

The Chi-square analysis showed no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and age ( $\chi^2 = 16.3$ ;  $p = 0.061$ ) or gender ( $\chi^2 = 6.02$ ;  $p = 0.111$ ). This means that, these factors have no or little influence to emotional intelligence. However, there were significant relationships between emotional intelligence and other factors, such as religion ( $\chi^2 = 51.7$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), ethnicity ( $\chi^2 = 62.2$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ), and college ( $\chi^2 = 78.0$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). These means that emotional intelligence is influenced by religious practices, cultural background, and the specific college environment.



The findings in the study of Vaishyak & Joshi (2023) noted that there is no significant correlation between age and gender with emotional intelligence which is consistent in this research. Additionally, emotional intelligence's positive correlation with religious coping leads to the point that improving how students cope with religious or spiritual challenges could boost emotional intelligence (Nesami et al., 2015) which is also similar to this finding. Furthermore, different personality traits and social factors among students from various ethnic backgrounds may influence the differences in their emotional intelligence (Mahato et al., 2015). Lastly, the development of the students' emotional intelligence may be influenced by the overall culture of the college environment which aligns with the findings of Gujjar et al. (2010).

Table 4. Relationship Between Respondents' Profile and their Level of Adaptability to the University's Diverse Culture

Demographic Profile	Level of Adaptability to the University's Diverse Culture		
	$\chi^2$	p-value	Interpretation
Age	12.0	0.675	Not significant
Gender	3.85	0.572	Not significant
Religion	39.0	0.514	Not significant
Ethnicity	235	<0.001	Significant
College	87.4	<0.078	Not significant

In determining if demographics have influence students' ability to adapt to the university's diverse culture, the chi-square correlation analysis was used. The results showed no significant relationship between adaptability and factors like age ( $\chi^2 = 12.0$ ;  $p = 0.675$ ), gender ( $\chi^2 = 3.85$ ;  $p = 0.572$ ), college ( $\chi^2 = 87.4$ ;  $p = 0.078$ ), or religion ( $\chi^2 = 39.0$ ;  $p = 0.51$ ), suggesting that these factors don't have a major impact on how well students adapt. However, ethnicity showed a strong link with adaptability ( $\chi^2 = 235$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that ethnic background plays a role in how students adjust to the cultural diversity around them.

This finding is also observed in the study of Agormedah et al. (2021), who found that factors like age and gender have minimal effects on one's sense of belonging, especially in collectivist cultures where social connections are particularly important. Additionally, improving students' subjective well-being has been linked to better adaptability and positive behavior. Some studies also suggest that while religion can have a small positive effect on well-being, its influence might be limited by institutional factors (Wulff, 1998).

Table 5. Relationship Between the Respondents' Level of Emotional Intelligence and Adaptability to the University's Diverse Culture

Level of Emotional Intelligence	Level of Adaptability to the University's Diverse Culture		
	$\chi^2$	p-value	Interpretation
	161	<0.001	Significant

The chi-square analysis showed a strong connection between students' emotional intelligence and their ability to adapt to the university's diverse culture ( $\chi^2 = 161$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that higher emotional intelligence contributes to better adaptability. This result is similar to the findings of Schutte et al. (2001) that says individuals with higher emotional intelligence exhibited better performance at adopting to diverse cultures, leading to stronger relationships with others. A similar notion was exemplified by Thompson (2018) saying that international students with better understanding of cultural differences were more successful in interacting with others during their college years. This simply highlights the importance of emotional and cultural intelligence for a successful social integration as noted by Liao et al. (2021), who emphasized the positive effects of emotional intelligence and cultural adaptability on multicultural adjustments.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that in the area of emotional intelligence, participants show moderate ability in identifying emotions, while having a strong self-regulation of emotions and effective empathic abilities. However, they

have difficulty in sustaining positive emotions and managing the emotions of others. While participants show high sensitivity to cultural diversity, they need to improve in their understanding of the legal, economic, and social frameworks of different cultures. Additionally, the respondents shows that they face challenges in the way they adapt to the diverse cultural environment of the university, as shown in their metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral responses to cultural interactions.

The overall findings of this research suggests the necessity of implementing strategies to improve students' emotional intelligence which may positively impact their ability to adapt to the diverse university environment which may have a positive implication for promoting inclusivity within the university.

The demographic profile analysis revealed that most respondents were aged 21-23 (59.2%), with a female majority (55.5%). Islam was the predominant religion, followed by Roman Catholicism. The study also found that the Meranao and Bisaya ethnic groups were the most represented, showing the importance of ethnic diversity in shaping the results.

In terms of emotional intelligence, respondents exhibited moderate ability in emotion recognition ( $WM = 5.15$ ) and strong self-regulation of emotions ( $WM = 5.37$ ), but faced challenges in expressing emotions ( $WM = 5.10$ ). Regarding adaptability, while respondents demonstrated cultural awareness and the ability to adjust their behaviors, there is a need for improvement in their cognitive understanding of other cultures.

The findings revealed no significant correlation between age and gender with emotional intelligence, indicating that cultural background may play a more significant role. However, religion and ethnicity were identified as significant factors influencing both emotional intelligence and adaptability, with ethnicity particularly affecting adaptability to cultural diversity.

To conclude, age or gender do not significantly influence emotional intelligence, which means these factors don't appear to impact EI levels. On the other hand, religion and ethnicity were found to have significant influence on adaptability to the university's diverse culture, with ethnicity having the strongest effect. The study suggests that helping students improving their emotional intelligence could be key to helping them become more adaptable to diverse environments.

Based on these findings, the researchers recommend the following:

- For Mindanao State University -Main campus. The university should give emphasis on promoting Emotional Intelligence to students by offering workshops, seminars, and courses that help them develop their emotional skills and provide an inclusive university atmosphere where students from different backgrounds feel free to interact and learn from each other.
- For Faculty Members. They should integrate emotional intelligence into their teaching strategies in order to help students better navigate the diverse cultural perspectives in the classroom.
- For Students. They should also help themselves by taking initiatives to develop their emotional intelligence by joining in workshops, extracurricular activities, and other activities to associate with other students from other culture in order to better adapt and thrive in the culturally rich environment of MSU.
- For Future Researchers. They could focus on the long-term impact of students' Emotional Intelligence on Cultural Adaptability, on how emotional intelligence influences academic performance, social integration, and career success.
- Additionally, future research could combine self-reported tools and behavioral assessments to more accurately measure emotional intelligence and cultural flexibility. Adding qualitative methods, like interviews or focus groups, may also provide deeper insights. It's also important to consider controlling for external factors such as prior intercultural experiences, personality traits, and institutional diversity programs, as these can influence the results. Lastly, involving a culturally diverse sample can help ensure the findings are more relevant and applicable across different educational settings.

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