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Correlation between students' emotional intelligence and emotional dependency


Correlación entre la inteligencia emocional de los alumnos y la dependencia emocional

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to determine the specifics of the relationship between the components of emotional intelligence (EI) and the emotional dependency (ED) reactions in student age. The MSCEIT (The Mayer–Salovey–Caruzo Emotional Intelligence Test) and R. Hirshfield's Interpersonal Dependence Test were used to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. The article analyses the dynamics and correlation of indicators for educational courses at the bachelor's level of higher education institutions (HEIs). The prevalence of the medium indicators of the levels of EI and manifestations of ED was found during the studied period. A significant increase in EI indicators was determined between the second and third years of study. A gradual decrease in the ED reaction before the completion of studies in HEIs was recorded. Significant correlations of the ED parameters with the conscious management of emotions, the ability to understand and identify experiences were calculated. Most often, the connections between the EI components were established to manifested with the level of self-confidence. It can be stated that high EI indicators determine a decrease in EI. The research prospects may be the development and verification of



the effectiveness of programmes for EI development at student age.

Keywords: Emotional dependency, emotional intelligence, students, emotion management, emotional sphere, self-confidence.

Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es determinar las especificidades de la relación entre los componentes de la inteligencia emocional (IE) y las reacciones de dependencia emocional (DE) en la edad estudiantil. Para alcanzar la finalidad y los objetivos del estudio se utilizaron el MSCEIT (Test de Inteligencia Emocional Mayer-Salovey-Caruzo) y el Test de Dependencia Interpersonal de R. Hirshfield. El artículo analiza la dinámica y la correlación de los indicadores de los cursos educativos de nivel licenciatura de las instituciones de enseñanza superior (IES). Se encontró la prevalencia de los indicadores medios de los niveles de IE y manifestaciones de DE durante el periodo estudiado. Se determinó un aumento significativo de los indicadores de IE entre el segundo y el tercer año de estudio. Se registró una disminución gradual de la reacción de DE antes de la finalización de los estudios en IES. Se calcularon correlaciones significativas de los parámetros de la DE con la gestión consciente de las emociones, la capacidad de comprender e identificar experiencias. En la mayoría de los casos, se estableció que las conexiones entre los componentes de la IE se manifestaban con el nivel de autoconfianza. Se puede afirmar que los indicadores de IE elevados determinan una disminución de la IE. Las perspectivas de investigación pueden ser el desarrollo y la verificación de la eficacia de los programas de desarrollo de la IE en la edad estudiantil.

Palabras clave: Autoconfianza, dependencia emocional, esfera emocional, estudiantes, inteligencia emocional, gestión de las emociones.

Introduction

The modern educational system must adapt to current social realities and be based on sound pedagogical methods and focused on mental development (Diachenko et al., 2022). EI is an important element of effective education that has a positive effect on academic success and the general development of students (Quílez-Robres et al., 2023). In particular, this is determined by the growing role of emotions in the regulation of the psyche in adolescence and young adulthood (Camacho-Morles et al., 2021). EI enables regulating experiences and cope with emotional stress in various social and professional spheres (Bru-Luna et al., 2021). The positive influence of the studied phenomenon on the individual's psychological health was proved (Kotsou et al., 2019). EI was established to be significantly related to learning outcomes, educational orientation, and trust in the teacher among students of higher education institutions (HEIs) (Shafait et al., 2021). There are also academic data confirming the positive impact of EI on the system of interpersonal relationships in student age (Caleon et al., 2019).

The latest results are directly related to the study of ED, which significantly limits the freedom and individuality of a person, blocking the opportunities for self-development (Dias Alves et al., 2023). ED creates a situation where an individual neglects his/her own needs and focuses on meeting other people's needs, which causes negative but necessary experiences (Moyeda et al., 2020). The researchers are trying to determine ED in student age. In particular, the relationship of ED with violence and jealousy in youth was studied (Arbinaga et al., 2021). The studies aimed at determining ED indicators of higher school students during the social isolation of quarantine restrictions are also worth noting (Gonzales-Castro et al., 2022). At the same time, the lack of studies that would reveal the connection between EI and ED in the student period can be stated. The study of this issue will allow to more effectively solve practical issues of higher education related, in particular, to the psychological support of the subjects of the educational process.



The aim of the article is to determine the specifics of the relationship between the EI components and the ED reactions in student age.

Research objectives:

- 1) Identify the key characteristics of management and understanding of emotions in higher school students;
- 2) Establish the dynamics of EI and ED indicators during studies in HEIs;
- 3) Analyse the correlation indicators of EI and ED in the student period;
- 4) Establish the dynamics of EI and ED indicators during studies in HEIs.

Literature Review

The problem of EI in psychological science is interpreted in the context of three main positions: as an ability; as a personality trait; combined approach (Bru-Luna et al., 2021). It is appropriate to mention each of these approaches. Mayer et al., (2004) explain EI as a complex of abilities consisting of the following components: perception and reflection of emotions, emotional activation of thinking, understanding of experiences (own and other peoples'), emotional regulation. Another approach defines EI as a stable behavioural model (trait) that, compared to abilities, does not undergo changes over a long period of time. According to Petrides et al., (2016), the main EI components as traits are psychological well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability. The latter approach combines features of the previous two theoretical positions. An example of such an interpretation is the Goleman's model (2009), according to which EI includes the ability to recognize and control emotions, self-motivate, and manage interpersonal interactions. These competencies are related to the disposition to leadership and effective management as a personal trait. One of the main functions of EI is the formation of resilience and effective coping with distress (Bunce et al., 2019). Such terminological pluralism determines a large number of instruments for measuring the studied mental phenomenon, which are conditioned by different theoretical concepts (O'Connor et al., 2019). The relevant aspect of the study of EI is the analysis of its manifestations in different social categories.

EI has sufficiently high levels in student age, however, these indicators may differ depending on gender and field of study (Kant, 2019). In general, the research results on EI in higher school students are quite contradictory. There are studies that confirm the relationship between students' academic performance and EI (Altwijri et al., 2021). These characteristics interact through the level of cognitive engagement in the higher education process (Iqbal et al., 2022). At the same time, other studies deny such a relationship, but confirm the correlation between EI indicators and the well-being of students with gender differences (Toscano-Hermoso et al., 2020). The influence of EI on the formation of learning habits of higher school students was proved (Bhat & Khandai, 2016). In the educational process, higher school students tend to focus more on negative emotional states that arise during the performance of academic tasks in the study of the humanities (O'Toole, & O'Flaherty, 2022). Experiencing positive emotions by higher school students is based on awareness and understanding of the educational process, which increases confidence in interpersonal relationships (Kerins et al., 2020). The practical importance of special pedagogical influence focused on the development of students' EI is undoubted (Gonzales, 2022). Such influence should focus on the development of empathy, emotional awareness, social openness, and tolerance (Care et al., 2018). An important direction of pedagogical work in this context should be the formation of moral values as the realization of one of the main goals of education (Tretiak et al., 2021). In this context, the use of modern gadgets and video games to improve the EI structures of youth is worth noting (Cejudo et al., 2019).

Emotional dependency is a mental phenomenon that involves the following components: cognitive (perception of one's own weakness); affective (fear of loneliness and negative attitude of the social environment); motivational (steady desire for external approval of one's own actions); behavioural (conformism of social interaction) (Bornstein, 2011). Zárate-Depraect et al. (2022) define EI as a personality disorder that is closely related to negative childhood experiences and is manifested in the desire to constantly meet other people's expectations. Disturbances in the functioning of neural mechanisms of the psyche are essential for the development of this phenomenon (Bution & Wechsler, 2016). Research



indicates that high ED is associated with domestic violence (Chafra-Quise & Lara-Machado, 2021) and an irrational desire to meet other people's needs (Moyeda et al., 2020). In young people, ED is associated with behavioural impulsivity, childhood trauma, and granting independence from parents (Estévez et al., 2018). The correlation of the phenomenon with distance anxiety and the search for social attention was recorded in students (Lemos et al., 2019).

Therefore, the study of EI and ED is a relevant direction of modern psychological and medical research. If we focus on the psychological aspect of the problem, the study of these phenomena opens up opportunities for optimizing the educational process in higher school. Clarifying the connection between students' EI and ED opens up opportunities to improve a number of theoretical models of pedagogy and psychology.

Methods and Materials

Let's analyse the key stages of the research:

1. The organizational stage involves the actions that determined the preparation for the collection and analysis of research data regarding the correlation between EI and ED. Cross section is a general strategy of actions. Communication with research participants was established in order to obtain adequate results from an academic and ethical perspective. The components of the studied phenomena are selected in accordance with the structure of the used methods and the analysed theoretical sources. The indicators of identification of emotions, use of emotions in activities, understanding of emotions, and conscious emotional management are distinguished as EI components. The ED components: emotional reliance on others, self-doubt, desire for autonomy. Two research hypotheses were determined: 1) the students' EI and ED components have statistically significant structural connections; 2) the nature of the correlation between EI and ED differs depending on the year of study in HEI. The stage took place during December–January 2023–2024.
2. Empirical stage – collection of research data. The stage involved conducting a diagnostic examination. The process of obtaining data took place in online interaction with prior communication with the participants. In this way, we could geographically cover a larger circle of subjects. If necessary, participants could withdraw from the study. All actions of the empirical stage were carried out in coordination with the administration of higher education institutions.
3. Stage of quantitative and qualitative processing of research data. Primary empirical profiles were calculated, i.e. individual results according to diagnostic methods were determined. Measurement scales and their types are defined. The procedure for calculating the percentages of the studied components was carried out. Correlation analysis was carried out.
4. The data interpretation stage — its main goal is drawing conclusions and their correlation with the objectives set at the beginning of the research. The work was based on a structural approach to explaining research information.

Instruments

The aim of the research were achieved through the selection of test methods based on their ease of use and the ability to quickly collect a large amount of empirical data. The MSCEIT was chosen, which has high validity and reliability indicators in the Ukrainian adaptation of the methodology (Shyron, 2022). The test is objective and contains a description of social situations that require an adequate solution from the respondent as stimulus material. The total duration of the test is 30–40 minutes. The research also used the Hirshfeld's Interpersonal Dependence Test adapted to Ukrainian (Hirschfeld et al., 1977). The questionnaire includes 48 subjective questions processed according to the general scale and subscales. The validity and reliability of the method was confirmed by expert evaluation of the instrument.



Sample

The study involved students from HEIs of different cities of Ukraine — Kyiv, Odesa, Kramatorsk, Sumy, Zhytomyr, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk. The sample was formed through personal communication of the authors of the study with the administration of educational institutions. In this way, direct access was obtained to the students with whom communication was carried out in order to involve them in the research. Four samples differentiated by the year of study were determined in order to fulfil the research objectives: 111 people (first year); 102 people (second year); 105 people (third year); 99 people (fourth year). The total sample is 417 people. The sample includes students who have reached the age of majority (above 18), so participation was determined by the students' informed consent. These students studied different majors: Secondary Education, Pedagogy, Philology, Architecture, etc. Master's students did not participate in the study, as they are characterized by a wide range of age differences at this level. So, it could affect the conclusions regarding the dynamics of the studied emotional components. All research participants stayed in Ukraine at the time of empirical data collection.

The data were collected online by entering stimulus material into Google forms. Detailed instructions were the key to effective use of the methods. The direct absence of the researcher during the collection of empirical material made it possible to avoid the Pygmalion effect and data deformation because of the attitude towards the experimenter. A total of 11 students refused to participate in the study during the use of the diagnostic tools. Their results are not taken into account in the final data processing.

The data analysis is aimed at determining the quantitative indicators of the dynamics and correlation of the studied components of the students' emotional sphere. Percentage trends of general parameters are presented graphically in the form of diagrams. This distribution is based on the scales of specific used diagnostic tools. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the EI and ED components. The data were processed in SPSS Statistics.

Results

The results of the diagnostics of EI and ED are presented in diagrams. The percentage distribution of each of the levels of the components of emotional sphere is graphically presented. The obtained results are analysed taking into account the fact that the research was conducted using a cross-sectional strategy. At the same time, attention is paid to the general integral indicators of the studied phenomena. Changes in general indicators of EI are presented in Figure 1.

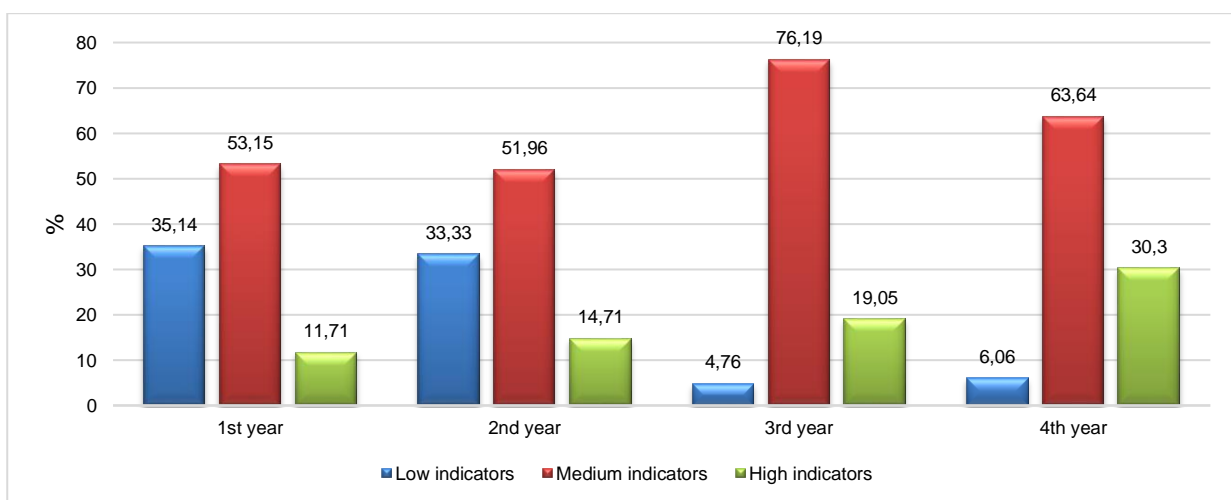


Figure 1. The dynamics of EI during the students' studies in HEIs

At the beginning of studies, more than a third of students have low indicators of the parameter. A small part of first-year students (11.71%) demonstrates a high ability to recognize and control emotions. More than half of the respondents have a medium level of EI. We connect the obtained results with changes in the social situation and processes of adaptation to study in HEIs. No significant changes in the parameter were found in the surveyed second-year higher school students compared to the previous sample. So, we can talk about a certain “plateau” in the EI dynamics during the first two years of study in the higher education system. In the third year, the percentage of people with medium indicators increases (by 24.23%). High indicators are also growing insignificantly (by 4.34%). At the same time, a decrease in the percentage of people with a low level of EI is recorded among third-year students. In the sample of the fourth-year bachelor’s students compared to the third-year students, the percentage of low indicators of the parameter almost did not change. High indicators increased by more than 10%. So, the performed diagnostics demonstrates the transformation of EI indicators between the second and third year of study. Changes in the students’ ED during their studies in HEIs are presented in Figure 2.

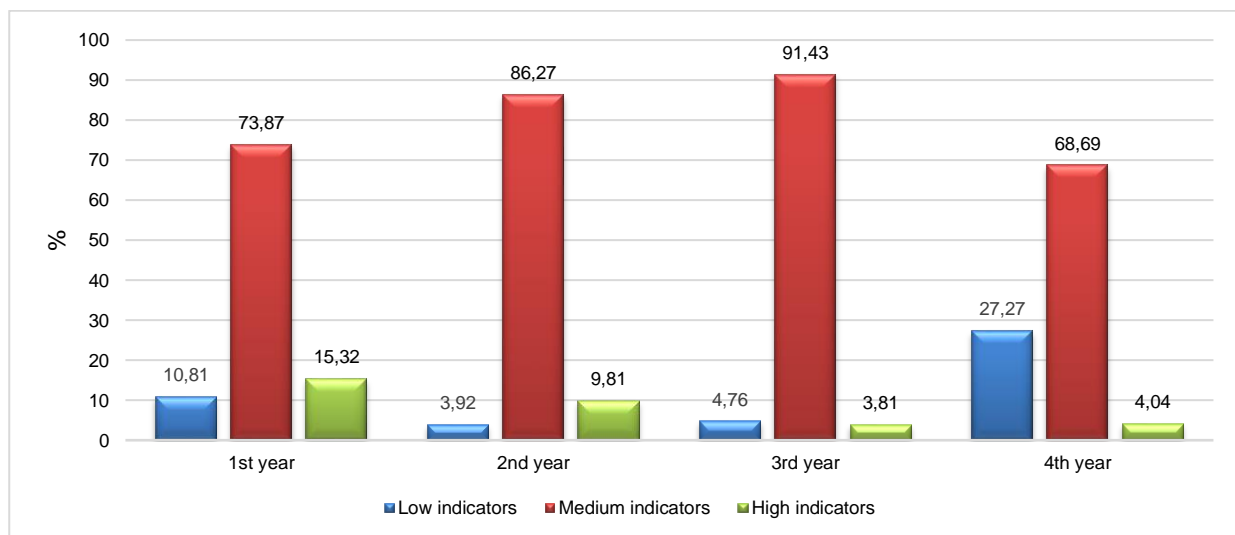


Figure 2. The ED dynamics during the students’ study in HEIs

There is a significant predominance of medium indicators among the first-year students. At the same time, the manifestations of low and high levels are similar: 10–15%. A further increase in the percentage of persons with a medium level of ED (more than 10%) was found among second-year students. The identified trend continues in the third year of the bachelor’s level. During the second and third year, a gradual decrease in the number of persons with high ED manifestations is recorded. Such indicators may indirectly indicate emotional pathology, therefore they require special attention of psychologists and teachers. In the fourth year, a rapid increase in the number of persons with a low level of ED is recorded among students. At the same time, high indicators remain unchanged. The main points of the dynamics of the studied parameter are the dominance of the medium level and the gradual growth of low manifestations of the component until the completion of studies in HEIs.

In the context of the aim of the research, the correlation coefficients between the EI and ED components are analysed below (Table 1).

Table 1.
Correlation matrix of parameters of students' EI with manifestations of ED

EI parameters	ED parameters		
	Emotional reliance on the environment	Self-doubt	Striving for autonomy
A sample of the first-year students			
Identification of emotions	0.022	-0.432**	0.009
The use of emotions in activities	0.329**	-0.092	0.112
Understanding emotions	0.001	-0.478**	0.054
Conscious management of emotions	0.107	-0.513**	0.442**
A sample of the second-year students			
Identification of emotions	0.109	-0.507**	0.093
The use of emotions in activities	0.404**	-0.033	0.121
Understanding emotions	0.039	-0.429**	0.068
Conscious management of emotions	0.131	-0.491**	0.399**
A sample of the third-year students			
Identification of emotions	0.038	0.145	0.296**
The use of emotions in activities	-0.109	0.430**	-0.002
Understanding emotions	-0.423**	-0.434**	0.049
Conscious management of emotions	-0.040	-0.521**	0.421**
A sample of the fourth-year students			
Identification of emotions	0.032	0.098	-0.119
The use of emotions in activities	0.025	0.010	-0.120
Understanding emotions	0.031	0.022	0.003
Conscious management of emotions	0.002	-0.398**	0.418**

The Identification of Emotions parameter reflects the ability to understand other people's experiences primarily due to the perception of non-verbal communication signals. In the first-year students, a significant inverse correlation of this component with self-doubt was found ($r=-0.432$). This means that the ability to identify emotions adds stability to the student in solving communicative situations. No significant correlations with the other two parameters were found in the first year. A similar trend is observed in the second-year students, but the strength of the inverse correlation is increasing ($r=-0.507$). In the sample of the third-year students, this correlation loses statistical significance. At the same time, a direct correlation coefficient of the ability to identify emotions with students' independence was established ($r=0.296$). In the sample of the fourth-year students, significant correlations of the ability to understand non-verbal communication with the ED components are felt. It is interesting that in all samples there is no significant correlation of the studied ability with indicators of reliance on the environment.

The use of emotions in activities and thinking characterizes the productivity of the realization of experiences to increase the effectiveness of achieving the students set goals. This component has direct relevant connections only with emotional reliance on the environment in the first-year students ($r=0.329$). The tendency increases in the second year. In the third year, this parameter is directly correlated with self-doubt ($r=0.430$). This means that the active realization of emotions in this period can have an disquieting neurotic nature. No significant correlation between the use of emotions in activities and ED components were recorded in the fourth year.

The Understanding of Emotions parameter reflects a person's ability to analyse complex emotional acts and their complexes. This EI property is actualized in the student period. In the first, second, and third years, this parameter is inversely correlated with self-doubt ($r=-0.478$; $r=-0.429$; $r=-0.434$). This means that the ability to understand other people is an important condition for a person's confidence and emotional stability. In the third year, inverse correlations with emotional reliance on the environment were found in the studied sample ($r=-0.423$). No significant correlations between the ability to understand emotions and the ED components were recorded with other parameters during the studied period.



Conscious Management of Emotions is an EI component that is responsible for controlling one's own experiences. Throughout the studied period, a stable trend of an inverse significant correlation of this component with self-doubt was recorded ($r=-0.513$; $r=-0.491$; $r=-0.521$; $r=-0.398$). This indicates the importance of emotional control to avoid emotional addiction in the student age. There is also a stable direct correlation of this EI parameter with the desire for autonomy in all four years of study ($r=0.442$; $r=0.399$; $r=0.421$; $r=0.418$). There are no significant correlations between the ability to consciously manage emotions and the phenomenon of emotional reliance on the environment during the studied period.

Discussion

The generalized research hypothesis is the statement that the students' EI and ED components have statistically significant structural correlations that change during higher education. In general, the results of the study confirm this assumption. A peculiar turning point in the genesis of the studied phenomena is the middle of the study period at the bachelor's level (second and third years of study). The results obtained during the research somewhat contradict the data of other studies, which demonstrated the prevalence of high indicators of the phenomenon in the student age (Kant, 2019). The dominance of medium indicators in the studied samples is explained by the socio-cultural context and fixation in different years of study. The consistent links of EI with self-confidence and autonomy support the notion of the phenomenon's impact on student well-being (Toscano-Hermoso et al., 2020). The students' ED manifests itself in social insecurity and is associated with impulsiveness of actions (Estévez et al., 2018). This position was one of the key positions for our research. The ability to understand oneself and the emotions of the social environment reduces the need to seek the attention of members of primary groups and blocks anxiety from experiencing loneliness (Lemos et al., 2019). The obtained data give grounds to state that students have sufficient self-development opportunities (Dias Alves et al., 2023), which gradually increase during their studies. At the same time, the destabilization of the emotional sphere is recorded in the first years, which we associate with the active adaptation of the personality to new social and educational conditions.

One of the main difficulties of our research was the selection of adequate diagnostic methods, which is associated with a large number of EI measurement methods based on various theoretical approaches (O'Connor et al., 2019). In the context of the issue under research, it is appropriate to plan and implement a special pedagogical impact focused on the development of the EI of higher school students (Gonzales, 2022). The basis of such actions should be the stimulation of awareness of one's own activities and the formation of confidence in social interaction (Kerins et al., 2020). It is also promising to develop classes on the formation of instrumental mechanisms for identification and understanding of the emotional sphere, social openness and tolerance (Care et al., 2018). In other words, students need to be provided with specific psychological tools that should optimize both the reflection of their own experiences and stimulate the impact on other people's emotions. In this context, it should be noted that professional psychotherapeutic influence based on work with negative childhood experiences of the individual is appropriate with high ED indicators (Zárate-Depraect et al., 2022).

Limitations

The results would more fully reveal the subject under research, provided that the direction of students' training is taken into account in the context of determining the connection between EI and ED. The accuracy of the results would increase due to the clarification of the gender aspect of the studied mental phenomena. A relevant criterion for the distribution of the studied samples is also the area of residence of higher school students, which is connected with experiencing hostilities in Ukraine.

Recommendations

- 1) Introduce selective training courses or fragments of the main educational components into educational programs for the purpose of building the competencies of identification and understanding of emotions by students;



- 2) Conduct regular diagnostic tests to record changes in the emotional sphere of higher school students;
- 3) Create and implement adaptation programmes for the first-year students based on data on the manifestations of students' EI and ED;
- 4) Build students' ability to argue their own position in the context of assertiveness development;
- 5) Not to suppress the manifestations of individuality of higher school students, especially in the context of public and educational activities;
- 6) Organize psychological clubs where films and literary works are analysed from the standpoint of understanding the emotional sphere of the characters;
- 7) Educate the psychological culture of the subjects of the educational process, where the emotional self-control is of key importance.

Conclusions

There is almost no data on the connection between EI and ED in the student period in psychological science, which urges the theoretical significance of the relevant research. The practical significance of the study is determined by its focus on changing higher education towards increased humanization and individualization. During the studied period, medium indicators of EI and manifestations of ED prevail. A significant transformation of EI is observed between the second and third year of study. The ED reactions gradually decrease until the completion of studies in HEIs. Significant correlations of the ED parameters with the conscious management of emotions, the ability to understand and identify experiences were recorded. Most often, the connections between the EI components are manifested with the level of self-confidence. It can be said that high EI indicators determine a decrease in ED. By the end of the training, the importance of controlling the emotional sphere for reducing the symptoms of ED increases, while the correlation of components of ED with other components of EI is minimized. The obtained results have practical significance in the context of creating effective psychological assistance programmes for participants in the educational process in higher education. In particular, the obtained data can increase the effectiveness of programmes for building stress resistance and overcoming students' anxiety in the educational process and interpersonal interaction. The research prospects include the development and verification of the effectiveness of programmes for EI development at student age.

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