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Original research article

Associations Between Emotional Intelligence and Personality Traits Among Socially Active Students

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Abstract

Introduction. This study is a first exploration of associations between emotional intelligence and personality traits in a new generation of socially active students. The authors consider associations of emotional intelligence and personality traits both on levels of domains and facets.

Methods. The study sample comprised 132 students of Southern Federal University aged 17–25 years (80 females and 52 males). All the respondents were representatives of socially active youth; they took an active part in professional and creative competitions, social projects, and self-assessed their level of social activity as high or above average. The study used the following psychological tests: (a) the EmIn inventory for assessing emotional intelligence by D. V. Lyusin and (b) the Big Five Inventory-2 modified by S. A. Schebetenko. The statistical data processing was performed using R software, employing descriptive, correlational, and regression analysis methods.

Results and Discussion. Socially active students' emotional intelligence had general (characteristic of all its components) and specific (characteristic of its individual components) associations with personality traits. General associations are those among 'negative emotionality' and 'anxiety' and all the structural components of emotional intelligence. Positive associations among 'energy level' and the components of emotional intelligence related to managing emotions, and negative ones among 'emotional volatility' and structural components of intrapersonal emotional intelligence ($p \leq 0.05$) are classified as specific. The combination of negative emotionality and agreeableness affects general and interpersonal emotional intelligence; the combination of extraversion and negative emotionality affects intrapersonal emotional intelligence.

Conclusion. The results can be applied for the development of students' individual educational trajectories and recommendations for psychological and pedagogical support of students with leadership talent and special educational needs in social activity.

Keywords

emotional intelligence, personality traits, negative emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, open-mindedness, conscientiousness, social activity, students, special educational needs

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Highlights

- High scores on extraversion as a personality trait of socially active students contribute to an increase in the level of interpersonal emotional intelligence. Low scores on negative emotionality contribute to the development of intrapersonal emotional intelligence.
- The combination of negative emotionality and agreeableness affects general and interpersonal emotional intelligence. The combination of extraversion and negative emotionality affects intrapersonal emotional intelligence.
- Results of the study of associations among negative emotionality, extraversion, and emotional intelligence may be used in the development of technologies for psychological counselling when working with students with needs for social activity.

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Introduction

The development of Russian education in the 21st century is impossible without answers to social challenges. To become competitive and successful under overabundance of information and a considerably increased number of interpersonal contacts, a today's student must be socially active and constantly develop his/her communication skills. At the same time, a young person's emotional intelligence, which contributes to an adequate perception of a partner and emotional self-regulation, which, in turn, affects his/her communication efficiency is of great importance.

Over the past three decades, there has been a considerable increase in the number of research papers aimed at studying emotional intelligence. Most of these works examine the role of emotional intelligence in the personal and professional achievements of young people. In particular, the authors indicate that there is a reliable association of a high level of emotional intelligence with willingness to successfully master university programs in the online format (Alenezi, 2020), emotional regulation (Megías-Robles et al., 2019), emotional stability (Lyusin & Mohammed, 2018), and successful interprofessional communication and student leadership qualities (Haight et al., 2017). The highest level of emotional intelligence is observed in early adulthood, which is very important for young people's self-realization (Obukhova, 2013; Obukhova & Obukhova, 2015). Thus, researchers have shown a considerable role of emotional intelligence in successful social activity of young people.

The *'emotional intelligence'* concept was introduced in 1990 by P. Salovey and D. Mayer. The authors defined it as one of the forms of intelligence, which is responsible for individuals' ability to detect their own and other people's emotions and to use this information when forming an action plan (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Since then, the concept of emotional intelligence has been revised and changed several times. In Russian psychology, emotional intelligence was the most fully defined by D. V. Lyusin. According to D. V. Lyusin, emotional intelligence is a psychological construct that is formed during an individual's life under the influence of a number of factors that determine its

level and specific individual characteristics. Emotional intelligence includes individuals' ability to understand and control their emotions and emotions of others as well (Lyusin, 2004).

Associations of emotional intelligence and personality traits have been actively studied since the second decade of the 21st century (Bochkova & Meshkova, 2018; Vorobyeva, Perkov, & Shchetinina, 2017; Saakyan, 2015; Shipitko, 2019; Atta, Ather, & Bano, 2013). Undoubtedly, prior to this period there were empirical studies on this topic but they were mostly single (van der Zee, Thijs, & Schakel, 2002; Avsec, Takšić, & Mohorić, 2009). In psychology, emotional intelligence and personality traits are still studied in isolation from each other, when studying other psychological characteristics, for example, leadership, mood, etc. (Krasnov, 2018; Lyusin & Ovsyannikova, 2015; Belokon, 2008; Stolarski, Jankowski, Matthews, & Kawalerczyk, 2016). It was in studies that examined the effect of emotional intelligence and personality traits on other psychological characteristics that correlations between personality traits and emotional intelligence were established.

In Russian psychology, associations of emotional intelligence and personality traits were examined by Lyusin (2006). In his study the sample comprised students aged 17 to 27 years. Digitalization, a decrease in interpersonal communication among students, current epidemiological situation, expected increase in distance learning, and increase of its proportion in the mixed learning model explain certain changes in the level and structure of emotional intelligence among youth during the 20s of the 21st century. Besides, today's students are characterized by psychological features specific to the new generation that may be interrelated with emotional intelligence. However, to date, there is no evidence of such associations in Russian psychology.

In the study by Lyusin & Ovsyannikova (2015), the age of respondents ranged from 17 to 49 years old, which makes it impossible to compare the results of the study with the data obtained in 2006 and to consider changes in associations of emotional intelligence and personality traits between representatives of different generations.

We should also note that the issue whether the concept of emotional intelligence is an independent one is still under discussion. For example, the concept of emotional intelligence by Nosenko & Kovrig (see Andreeva, 2009) considers the complex of personality traits as a characteristic of emotional intelligence. At the same time, Andreeva (2009) opposes the inclusion of emotional intelligence in the complex of personality traits.

Several researchers presented more comprehensive studies on associations of emotional intelligence and personality traits (Alghamdi, Aslam, & Khan, 2017; Alegre, Pérez-Escoda, & López-Cassá, 2019; Avsec et al., 2009; Hjalmarsson & Dåderman, 2020; Edobor & Joseph, 2020). Most of the research data has been used as the basis for meta-analytic articles, which results are conflicting. For example, some studies conclude that emotional intelligence and the GFP (General Factor of Personality) are identical (Anglim, Morse, Dunlop, Minbashian, & Marty, 2020; van der Linden et al., 2017). Another meta-analytic study did not find correlations between personality traits and emotional intelligence (Miao, Humphrey, Qian, & Pollack, 2019). We should also note that all the meta-analytic studies used different models of emotional intelligence and personality traits.

Thus, we may conclude that the studies available at the moment are contradictory and incomplete, since most of them do not directly examine associations of emotional intelligence and personality traits; those of them that consider this issue cannot be comparable for several objective reasons. First, researchers base their findings on different theories and ideas about personality traits. Secondly, the age composition of the samples differs considerably. Accordingly, it is impossible to see a shift in associations of emotional intelligence and personality traits among different generations. At the

same time, the increased social activity of young people, which requires successful interpersonal communication and regulation of emotional states prompts to reconsider associations of emotional intelligence and psychological characteristics in today's students.

Therefore, this study *aims* to examine associations of characteristics of emotional intelligence and personality traits in socially active students.

The authors put forward the following *hypotheses:*

1. General and specific associations of the structural components of emotional intelligence and personality traits are characteristic of socially active students. General associations are those among all the components of emotional intelligence; specific associations are characteristic of its individual components.

2. A certain combination of personality traits may affect emotional intelligence of socially active students.

Methods

The research was carried out in two stages (preliminary and main). At the preliminary stage, the sample comprised 197 students aged 17–25 years, studying at Southern Federal University (mainly socio-humanitarian disciplines) and taking part in various professional and creative competitions, student project intensives, social projects, which was confirmed by the official lists of participants of these activities. Student participation in the study was voluntary. At the preliminary stage of the study, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire about the level of their own social activity (low, average, high, and below or above average).

At the main stage of the study, the sample comprised 150 students who self-assessed their own social activity as high and above average. Consequently, social activity of the students who took part in the study was determined by objective (participation in social events) and subjective (high and above average level of social activity) factors, which corresponds to the idea of its essential characteristics – self-determination and involvement in interaction (Kharlanova, 2011).

The tasks of the main stage of our empirical research were fully completed by 132 students out of 150 those participating at the preliminary stage. The results presented in this paper were obtained in the study of these 132 socially active students (aged 17–25) – 80 females (mean age = 19 ± 2) and 52 males (mean age = 21 ± 3). The participants of the main stage of the study were asked to fill out the following questionnaires: the EmIn inventory for assessing emotional intelligence by D. V. Lyusin (Lyusin, 2006) and the Big Five Inventory-2 modified by S. A. Schebetenko (Shchebetenko, Kalugin, Mishkevich, Soto, & John, 2018). The R software package was used for statistical data processing, including descriptive analysis, rank correlation analysis (Spearman's rho test), and multiple regression analysis.

Results and Discussion

Tables 1 and 2 present the results of descriptive statistics for the scales of emotional intelligence and personality traits of socially active students. Normal distribution is observed for all the characteristics.

There is a dispersion of the average scores of characteristics of emotional intelligence in the sample. Based on the average scores of the characteristics of emotional intelligence in the sample of students, we established the average level for interpersonal (44 scores) and general (86 scores) emotional intelligence and the low level (37 scores) for intrapersonal emotional intelligence. With normative mean scores of interpersonal (40–46), intrapersonal (39–47), and general (79–92) emotional

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intelligence (Lyusin, 2006), each of the diagnosed characteristics of emotional intelligence is between low and high scores (Table 1, Table 2).

The correlation analysis indicated the presence of general associations of the structural components of emotional intelligence and personality traits (Fig. 1).

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for the scales of the EmIn inventory

	Interpersonal emotional intelligence		
	Understanding emotions	Managing emotions	Interpersonal emotional intelligence
Minimum	14	4	26
Median	24	20	43
Mean	25	19	44
Maximum	36	29	65
SD	5	5	9
	General emotional intelligence		
	Understanding emotions	Managing emotions	General emotional intelligence
Minimum	23	17	52
Median	42	39	84
Mean	43	40	86
Maximum	62	57	121
SD	9	9	16
	Intrapersonal emotional intelligence		
	Understanding emotions	Managing emotions	Controlling expression	Intrapersonal emotional intelligence
Minimum	10	4	0	10
Median	18	13	10	39
Mean	19	13	11	37
Maximum	30	21	20	66
SD	5	4	4	14

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for the Big Five Inventory-2

	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Open-mindedness
Minimum	14	11	16
Median	39	45	46
Mean	38	45	46
Maximum	57	59	58
SD	9	8	8
	Conscientiousness	Negative emotionality	
Minimum	7	13	
Median	45	36	
Mean	46	36	
Maximum	69	58	
SD	9	9	

We observed a significant positive correlation between the scores the 'energy level' scale (facet of the 'extraversion' domain) and the following scales: 'managing emotions of others' ($r = 0.54$; $p < 0.01$), 'general level of interpersonal emotional intelligence' ($r = 0.50$; $p < 0.01$), and 'general level of emotional intelligence' ($r = 0.51$; $p < 0.01$). In addition, results showed that there is a significant negative correlation between the following scales: 'managing emotions' and 'depression' (facet of the 'negative emotionality' domain) ($r = –0.51$; $p < 0.01$); 'controlling expression' and 'negative emotionality' ($r = –0.51$; $p < 0.01$); 'general level of emotional intelligence' and 'negative emotionality' ($r = –0.54$; $p < 0.01$); 'general level of emotional intelligence' and 'anxiety' (facet of the 'negative emotionality' domain) ($r = –0.50$; $p < 0.01$); 'controlling expression' and 'emotional variability' (facet of the 'negative emotionality' domain) ($r = –0.54$; $p < 0.01$); 'general level of emotional intelligence' and 'emotional variability' (facet of the 'negative emotionality' domain) ($r = –0.50$; $p < 0.01$).

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Personality traits	Emotional intelligence characteristics									
	Understanding emotions of others	Managing emotions of others	**Interpersonal emotional intelligence**	Understanding individual emotions	Managing individual emotions	Controlling expression	**Intrapersonal emotional intelligence**	**General emotional intelligence**	**Understanding emotions**	**Managing emotions**
Extraversion	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.4
Sociability	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.3	0	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2
Assertiveness	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.5
Energy level	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.4
Agreeableness	0	0.2	0.12	0	0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0	0.1
Compassion	0.1	0.2	0.1	0	0	0.1	0	0.1	0	0.2
Respectfulness	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2
Trust	0	0	0	−0.1	0	0	0	0	0.1	0
Conscientiousness	0	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.2
Organization	0	0	0	0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0	0.2
Productiveness	0	0.1	0	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0	0.2
Responsibility	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.2
Negative emotionality	0.3	−0.3	−0.4	−0.4	−0.6	−0.5	−0.6	−0.6	−0.4	−0.4
Anxiety	−0.3	−0.4	−0.4	−0.3	−0.5	−0.5	−0.5	−0.6	−0.3	−0.3
Depression	−0.2	−0.3	−0.3	−0.4	−0.5	−0.2	−0.5	−0.5	−0.4	−0.3
Emotional volatility	−0.2	−0.1	−0.2	−0.3	−0.4	−0.6	−0.5	−0.5	−0.3	−0.3
Open-Mindedness	0	0.2	0.1	0.2	0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0
Intellectual curiosity	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2
Aesthetic sensitivity	−0.1	−0.1	0.1	0	−0.1	0	0	−0.1	0	0.2
Creative imagination	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.4

Figure 1. Associations of the structural components of emotional intelligence and personality traits: the correlation matrix

Legend: 1. The correlation matrix presents the correlation coefficient of the EmIn Inventory and the Big Five Inventory-2 (Spearman rank correlation). 2. Correlation coefficients with the level of significance less than 0.05 are crossed out by a horizontal line. 3. The integral characteristics of the EmIn Inventory are marked in bold font without underlining. The components of the integral characteristics of the EmIn Inventory are marked in normal font without underlining. Personality domains of the Big Five Inventory-2 are marked in bold font with underlining. Personality facets of the Big Five Inventory-2 are marked in normal font with underlining.

The above statistical data indicate that research participants with a high level of extraversion as a personality trait have a high level of interpersonal emotional intelligence, which is logical and natural, since socially active students have a pronounced external orientation towards society, which contributes to the formation of their skills. And if an individual enjoys communicating with others, then, accordingly, his/her skills of interaction and understanding emotions of others will be at a higher level. The second part of the data indicates that socially active students with low scores on facets of the 'negative emotionality' domain and this domain itself have a higher level of intrapersonal emotional intelligence by all its scales. This also seems to be very consistent with reality and theoretical logic, since individuals' ability to manage their emotions, understand them and control expression will positively affect a person's ability to cope with negative emotions.

Associations between 'negative emotionality' and 'extraversion' may be considered as a mechanism for psychological counselling, when, for example, the development of extraversion will lead to a change in the level of negative emotionality. Considering that extraversion, in turn, positively correlates with the level of interpersonal emotional intelligence, and negative emotionality is negatively correlates with intrapersonal emotional intelligence, and some components of intrapersonal emotional intelligence are associated with components of interpersonal emotional intelligence, it is likely to observe a certain interdependence. This means that influencing on one of the above criteria, we can change all the parameters of this circle of the interdependence. This pattern is important for the optimization of the educational process and psychological and pedagogical support of students with special educational needs, for example, with disabilities, with various kinds of addictions, with gifted students, and for the development of intrapersonal emotional intelligence in socially active students as well.

We also observed the following specific associations (see Fig. 1): 'sociability' (facet of the 'extraversion' domain) and the 'conscientiousness' domain positively correlated with the component of 'managing emotions' ($r = 0.3$ at $p < 0.05$); the 'responsibility' facet is positively correlated with the component of 'controlling expressions' ($r = 0.3$ at $p < 0.05$). 'Intellectual curiosity' and 'creative imagination' (facets of the 'open-mindedness' domain) are positively correlated with 'general emotional intelligence' ($r = 0.3$ at $p < 0.05$).

Consequently, the ability to evoke certain emotions in others, to reduce the intensity of unwanted emotions, as well as the ability to manipulate others are closely associated with individuals' level of sociability, open-mindedness, self-confidence, proactiveness, creative imagination, and their leadership qualities, enthusiasm, and ability to cope with stress.

Self-confidence, energy, and enthusiasm are also highly correlated with the socially active students' ability to control their emotions. Anxiety, constant tension, depression, inability to be in a positive mood after failures, emotional instability, and mood swings negatively affect the ability to manage emotions and their external manifestations. However, no significant associations were found between anxiety and constant tension, on the one hand, and the ability to recognize emotions, on the other. The study of participants' ability to cope with emotions and their manifestations was associated with responsibility, stability, ability to finish projects, persistence, organization, and a tendency to maintain order. At the same time, the high level of students' ability to understand and correctly interpret their emotions is associated with less pronounced tendency to depression, inability to maintain a positive mood after failures, emotional instability, and mood swings.

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Our findings do not go in line with the results of another study. In our study, 'extraversion' is positively correlated with all the integral structural components of emotional intelligence, with the exception of 'understanding emotions'. Meanwhile, Lyusin & Ovsyannikova (2015) state that 'extraversion' is positively correlated only with 'interpersonal emotional intelligence'. In the same study, 'conscientiousness' is positively correlated with all the integral structural components of emotional intelligence. However, the results described above indicate associations between 'conscientiousness' and 'intrapersonal emotional intelligence'. 'Agreeableness' is associated with 'understanding emotions', 'interpersonal emotional intelligence', and 'general emotional intelligence'. Meanwhile, in our study we observed no significant associations. Such differences in results may be explained by the different age composition of the samples, different time periods of the study, and the representation of socially active students in our study.

When conducting multiple regression analysis, we created three models, based on three main structural components of emotional intelligence – 'general emotional intelligence' (Table 3), 'interpersonal emotional intelligence' (Table 4), 'intrapersonal emotional intelligence' (Table 5). In each model we considered the impact of personality traits on a component of emotional intelligence.

Let us consider the results of the multiple regression analysis of the component of 'general emotional intelligence', which is integral for other ones. Model 1 presents the impact of personality domains on the integral component of 'general emotional intelligence' ($p < 0.01$). The proportion of the explained variance was 0.37, that is, about 37 % of the data on emotional intelligence may be explained by personality traits included in this model. This model indicate that such personality domains as 'extraversion', 'negative emotionality', and 'agreeableness' affect 'general emotional intelligence' ($p < 0.05$). The mutual impact of 'negative emotionality' and 'agreeableness' ($p < 0.05$) is also significant (Table 3).

Table 3
Multiple regression analysis, Model 1

Model 1. General emotional intelligence			
Rates			
Personality domain	β	Standard error	p-value
Extraversion	0,48778	0,23780	0.044617 *
Negative emotionality	-2,36926	0,65043	0.000564 ***
Open-mindedness	0,42365	0.22260	0.061816 .

Table 3
Multiple regression analysis, Model 1

Model 1. General emotional intelligence			
Agreeableness	-1,50200	0,63540	0.021341 *
Mutual impact of negative emotionality and agreeableness	0,03710	0,01676	0.030637 *
R-square: 0.4184; adjusted R-square: 0.3699 F-statistic: 8.632; p < 0.001 p-value: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.'			

Model 2 demonstrates the impact of personality domains on 'interpersonal emotional intelligence' (the proportion of explained variance is 18%, p < 0.005). In this case, 'extraversion', 'negative emotionality', and 'agreeableness' affect 'interpersonal emotional intelligence' (p < 0.05). There is also a mutual impact of 'negative emotionality' and 'agreeableness' (p < 0.05) (Table 4).

Table 4
Multiple regression analysis, Model 2

Model 2. Interpersonal emotional intelligence			
Rates			
Personality domain	β	Standard error	p-value
Extraversion	0,408431	0,151328	0,00906 **
Negative emotionality	-1,16168	0,408379	0,00610 **
Agreeableness	-0,89257	0,408479	0,03286 *
Conscientiousness	-0,00915	0,127652	0,94312

Table 4
Multiple regression analysis, Model 2

Model 2. Interpersonal emotional intelligence			
Mutual impact of negative emotionality and agreeableness	0,024612	0,01001	0,02287 *
R-square: 0.2341; adjusted R-square: 0.1839 F-statistic: 4.661; p < 0.01 p-value: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.'			

Model 3 demonstrates the impact of personality domains on 'intrapersonal emotional intelligence' (the proportion of the explained variance is 0.39, $p < 0.001$), i. e. 39 % of emotional intelligence may be explained by the impact of personality traits. Therefore, we may conclude that such personality traits as 'extraversion', 'negative emotionality', 'conscientiousness' affect intrapersonal emotional intelligence. There is also a mutual impact of 'extraversion' and 'negative emotionality' ($p < 0.01$) (Table 5).

Table 5
Multiple regression analysis, Model 3

Model 3. Intrapersonal emotional intelligence			
Rates			
Personality domain	β	Standard error	p-value
Extraversion	-1,68844	0,63156	0.009695 **
Negative emotionality	-2,48103	0,61641	0.000165 ***
Open-mindedness	0,18050	0,18736	0.339284
Agreeableness	-0,14458	0,21037	0.494628
Mutual impact of negative emotionality and extraversion	0,04540	0,01662	0.008296 **
Conscientiousness	0,60492	0,18742	0.002040 **
R-square: 0.4463; adjusted R-square: 0.39 F-statistic: 7.925; p < 0.001 p-value: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.'			

However, according to the data obtained on a sample from Saudi Arabia, 'negative emotionality' and 'conscientiousness' do not affect emotional intelligence (Alenezi, 2020). Whereas in our study, the results of multiple regression analysis indicated a significant effect of 'negative emotionality' on all the components of emotional intelligence. However, the data on the influence of 'extraversion' and 'agreeableness' are consistent with the results of the study by Alenezi (2020). These differences in results may be explained by ethno-cultural characteristics of the sample. At the same time, several studies confirm significant associations between emotional intelligence and negative emotionality (Lyusin & Ovsyannikova, 2015), as well as the impact of all the personality traits on emotional intelligence (Alegre et al., 2019). Significant effects of 'negative emotionality' and 'extraversion' for both genders were also observed in a sample of English-speaking respondents (Siegling, Furnham, & Petrides, 2015).

Conclusion

The following conclusions can be made from the results obtained from our study:

1. Socially active students' emotional intelligence had general (characteristic of all its components) and specific (characteristic of its individual components) associations with personality traits. General associations are those among 'negative emotionality' and 'anxiety' and all the structural components of emotional intelligence. Positive associations among 'energy level' and the components of emotional intelligence related to managing emotions, and negative ones among 'emotional volatility' and structural components of intrapersonal emotional intelligence ($p \leq 0.05$) are classified as specific.

2. The findings indicate that personality domains and facets affect emotional intelligence in socially active students. The combination of negative emotionality and agreeableness affects general and interpersonal emotional intelligence; the combination of extraversion and negative emotionality affects intrapersonal emotional intelligence.

The results obtained in the study and the conclusions drawn on their basis confirm the hypotheses of the study and can be used in the development of recommendations for the psychological and pedagogical support of students with special educational needs and with leadership talent. The revealed patterns may help develop pedagogical technologies, training programs, and individual educational trajectories of students.

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No conflict of interest