

# Emotional Intelligence and Intercultural Adaptation in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustment among University Students

**Wulan Patria Saroinsong**

wulansaroinsong@unesa.ac.id

Universitas Negeri Surabaya <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3688-8895>

**Diana Toleubaevna Ismailovab**

Abay Myrzakhmetov Kokshetau University, Kokshetau, Kazakhstan

**Mochamad Nursalim**

State University of Surabaya

**Kartika Rinakit Adhe**

State University of Surabaya

**Brwa Aziz Sidiq**

Zhejiang Normal University

---

## Systematic Review

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, intercultural adaptation, psychological adaptation, sociocultural adaptation, international students, higher education

**Posted Date:** October 13th, 2026

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11327673/v1>

**License:** © ⓘ This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.  
[Read Full License](#)

**Additional Declarations:** The authors declare no competing interests.

---

## Title Page

# Emotional Intelligence and Intercultural Adaptation in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustment among University Students

## Authors

**Wulan Patria Saroinsong<sup>a,\*</sup>**

**Diana Toleubaevna Ismailova<sup>b</sup>**

**Mochamad Nursalim<sup>a</sup>**

**Kartika Rinakit Adhe<sup>a</sup>**

**Brwa Aziz Sidiq<sup>c</sup>**

## Affiliations

<sup>a</sup> Department of Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA), Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup> Department of International Relation, Abay Myrzakhmetov Kokshetau University, Kokshetau, Kazakhstan

<sup>c</sup>Department of Education, Zhejiang Normal University, China

## Corresponding Author

**Wulan Patria Saroinsong, PhD**

Department of Early Childhood Education  
Faculty of Education  
Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA)  
Jl. Lidah Wetan, Surabaya 60213, Indonesia

Email: wulansaroinsong@unesa.ac.id

ORCID: 0000-0002-6326-0753

## Author Contributions

**Conceptualization:** Wulan Patria Saroinsong, Mochamad Nursalim

**Methodology:** Wulan Patria Saroinsong, Diana Toleubaevna Ismailova

**Literature Search and Screening:** Wulan Patria Saroinsong, Kartika Rinakit Adhe

**Data Extraction and Analysis:** Wulan Patria Saroinsong

**Writing – Original Draft:** Wulan Patria Saroinsong

**Writing – Review & Editing:** Diana Toleubaevna Ismailova, Mochamad Nursalim, Brwa Aziz Sidiq, Kartika Rinakit Adhe

**Supervision:** Mochamad Nursalim

All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

### **Declaration of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

### **Funding Statement**

This study was funded by the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM), Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA), Indonesia, under the Internal Research Grant Scheme. The funding body had no role in the design of the study, data collection, analysis, interpretation of findings, or preparation of the manuscript.

### **Data Availability Statement**

No new datasets were generated or analyzed during this study. All data included in this review were obtained from published sources cited in the manuscript.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to acknowledge Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA), Abay Myrzakhmetov Kokshetau University, Zhejiang Normal University for their support of international academic collaboration and research activities related to this study.

### **Running Head**

### **Emotional Intelligence and Intercultural Adaptation**

### **Keywords**

Emotional Intelligence; Intercultural Adaptation; Psychological Adaptation; Sociocultural Adaptation; International Students; Higher Education; Systematic Review

### Declaration of interests

X The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

☒The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

Wulan Patria Saroinsong reports financial support was provided by State University of Surabaya. Reports a relationship with that includes:. Has patent pending to. If there are other authors, they declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

# Emotional Intelligence and Intercultural Adaptation in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustment among University Students

## ABSTRACT

The internationalization of higher education has intensified intercultural interactions among university students, creating new challenges for psychological well-being and sociocultural adaptation. Emotional Intelligence (EI) has emerged as a key psychological resource for adjustment in multicultural academic environments, yet existing research remains fragmented, with inconsistent findings on the contribution of EI dimensions and limited evidence on cross-cultural validity. This critical review synthesizes contemporary empirical findings on the relationship between EI and intercultural adaptation among university students, examining how emotional perception, understanding, regulation, and utilization contribute differently to psychological and sociocultural adjustment, and evaluating methodological advances across cultural contexts. Findings suggest that emotional regulation and understanding are more strongly associated with psychological adaptation, whereas emotional perception and utilization play a greater role in sociocultural functioning. The review proposes an integrated multidimensional framework explaining how EI facilitates intercultural adaptation and identifies future directions for research and practice.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, intercultural adaptation, psychological adaptation, sociocultural adaptation, international students, higher education.

## INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of higher education has accelerated over the last decade, transforming universities into multicultural environments with growing student mobility and

global academic integration (; ). International students now constitute one of the fastest-growing populations in higher education, creating both opportunities for intercultural learning and challenges related to adaptation, belongingness, and well-being (; Bista, 2026).(Zabrodskaia & Wang, 2025Shi, 2026)(Zhai et al., 2025

Although studying abroad offers academic and professional advantages, international students frequently encounter adjustment difficulties from cultural differences, language barriers, unfamiliar academic expectations, and disrupted social support ; . These manifest in two interrelated domains: psychological adaptation (emotional well-being, mental health) and sociocultural adaptation (effective functioning in a new culture) (; ). Unsuccessful adaptation is linked to distress, lower academic performance, and weaker social integration (; ).(Xue, 2026Zhao et al., 2026)Kocaturk et al., 2026Zabrodskaia & Wang, 2025)Zhai et al., 2025Mugabekazi, 2026)

Scholars increasingly seek individual-level resources that facilitate adaptation in multicultural settings. Emotional Intelligence (EI) - the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions in intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts - has become one of the most influential constructs in higher education research ; . These competencies are especially important in culturally diverse environments, where students must interpret unfamiliar cues, regulate responses to uncertainty, and build cross-cultural relationships (Qi et al., 2026).(Aldosari & Alsager, 2026Mugabekazi, 2026)Wang et al., 2026).

Recent findings consistently support EI's contribution to educational outcomes. EI predicts adaptation and academic success among international students in Saudi universities and enhances academic resilience in cross-cultural contexts. Reviews indicate that emotional competencies help students cope with intercultural stressors, maintain well-being, and develop adaptive social behaviors (Martínez-Rodríguez & Ferreira, 2025; ).Aldosari & Alsager (2026)Mugabekazi (2026)Wang et al., 2026)

Despite growing interest, the literature remains fragmented. Many studies still conceptualize EI as unidimensional, overlooking the differential roles of its dimensions (Martínez-Rodríguez & Ferreira, 2025), and psychological and sociocultural adaptation are often examined separately despite being interconnected (; ).Mugabekazi, 2026)Kocaturk et al., 2026Zhao et al., 2026)

Cross-cultural validity is also a concern. Although EI is often framed as universal, evidence across diverse cultural settings remains inconclusive (Qi et al., 2026). Cultural norms shape emotional expression and interpersonal expectations, influencing both measurement and functioning of EI. Questions remain about whether EI operates similarly across populations and whether its dimensions contribute equally to psychological and sociocultural adjustment.Wang et al., 2026)(Yücekayalar et al., 2026Deschner-Warner, 2026)

Recent reviews call for integrative frameworks explaining the multidimensional processes underlying intercultural adjustment (; Xue & Singh, 2025). Few studies critically synthesize the mechanisms through which individual emotional competencies facilitate adjustment, constraining theory and intervention design.(Soheili & Lanz, 2025(Jagers et al., 2019)Jagers et al., 2021)

This review therefore critically examines the role of EI in facilitating psychological and sociocultural adaptation among university students, synthesizes evidence on EI's multidimensional nature, evaluates its contribution to different adaptation outcomes, and identifies theoretical and methodological directions for future research in international higher education.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Emotional Intelligence in Higher Education**

EI is among the most influential constructs in educational psychology for understanding how students navigate academic, social, and cultural challenges. Initially developed by , EI is

defined as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively - a set of cognitive-emotional competencies supporting adaptive behavior and decision-making.(Mayer & Salovey, 1997)

In higher education, EI is linked to academic achievement, well-being, resilience, interpersonal competence, and social integration ; . As universities attract increasingly diverse students, EI is recognized as a key factor enabling individuals to cope with cultural transitions.(Aldosari & Alsager, 2026Mugabekazi, 2026)(Wang et al., 2026).

EI is generally conceptualized through four dimensions: perception (identifying emotions in self and others), understanding (comprehending emotional meanings and dynamics), regulation (managing emotional responses), and utilization (employing emotions constructively for problem-solving and goal achievement).(Mayer et al., 2008).(Arbués et al., 2025)

These dimensions do not contribute equally to outcomes. Regulation is consistently linked to resilience and well-being, while perception is particularly important for interpersonal communication and social adaptation in multicultural settings (Qi et al., 2026), making a multidimensional approach essential.Mugabekazi, 2026).

### **Intercultural Adaptation Among University Students**

Intercultural adaptation is the process through which individuals adjust to unfamiliar cultural environments and develop competencies to function effectively within them - a central concern in higher education given the cultural, academic, and social transitions international students face (; ).(Zhao et al., 2026Zabrodskaia & Wang, 2025)

Ward and Kennedy's model distinguishes psychological adaptation (emotional well-being, life satisfaction, mental health) from sociocultural adaptation (behavioral competence and effective daily interaction within a host culture) (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

Psychological adaptation is shaped by internal factors such as coping, resilience, self-efficacy, and emotional competencies (; ). Sociocultural adaptation depends largely on communication skills, cultural knowledge, and interpersonal effectiveness for navigating social norms and relationships.(Zhai et al., 2025Xue, 2026)(Kocaturk et al., 2026).

The two domains are interconnected: psychological distress impedes social participation and intercultural communication, while successful sociocultural integration enhances emotional well-being and reduces adjustment stress (; ). Both must be examined simultaneously.(Zhao et al., 2026Xue, 2026)

### **Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Adaptation**

EI plays a significant role in psychological adaptation. Students with high EI are better able to manage stress, regulate negative emotions, and maintain emotional stability during uncertainty.(Aldosari & Alsager, 2026Mugabekazi, 2026).

Emotional regulation has the strongest empirical support as a predictor of psychological adjustment - students who regulate effectively report less anxiety, depression, and acculturative stress. Emotional understanding contributes by supporting accurate interpretation of stressors and adaptive coping.(Wang et al., 2026)

Reviews confirm EI as a protective factor against psychological vulnerability: stronger emotional competencies are linked to greater resilience and lower distress among international students in English-medium instruction contexts in Southeast Asia, and emotional resources are increasingly important given growing mental-health challenges. EI thus supports stability and well-being during intercultural transitions.Xue (2026)Zhai et al. (2025)

### **Emotional Intelligence and Sociocultural Adaptation**

EI also contributes substantially to sociocultural adaptation, which requires interpreting social cues, communicating effectively, and responding to culturally diverse situations - competencies that are inherently emotional and interpersonal (Qi et al., 2026).

Emotional perception is particularly important: it enables recognition of subtle emotional and behavioral signals that vary across cultures, helping students build social relationships and avoid misunderstandings.(Kocaturk et al., 2026).

Emotional utilization supports strategic use of emotions in communication and problem-solving, enhancing flexibility, empathy, and interpersonal effectiveness. Students with higher EI show stronger intercultural competence, social integration, and more positive intercultural experiences (; ).(Wang et al., 2026)Aldosari & Alsager, 2026Zabrodskaia & Wang, 2025)

Which EI dimensions most strongly influence sociocultural adaptation remains inconsistent across studies, underscoring the need for further theoretical integration.

## **Research Gap and Conceptual Framework**

Several critical gaps remain.

First, EI is often treated as a single construct, neglecting differential contributions of its dimensions. Second, psychological and sociocultural adaptation are usually studied independently. Third, evidence from non-Western regions - particularly ASEAN and Central Asia - remains limited despite rapid regional internationalization.

This review therefore proposes EI as a multidimensional adaptation resource in which:

1. Emotional Regulation and Emotional Understanding primarily facilitate Psychological Adaptation.
2. Emotional Perception and Emotional Utilization primarily facilitate Sociocultural Adaptation.

This conceptualization provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding how emotional competencies contribute to successful intercultural adjustment among university students.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

1 This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to critically examine  
2 the role of emotional intelligence in facilitating psychological and sociocultural adaptation  
3 among university students in multicultural higher education environments. The systematic  
4 literature review approach was selected because it enables a comprehensive, transparent, and  
5 reproducible synthesis of empirical evidence from existing studies while identifying theoretical  
6 developments, methodological trends, and research gaps within a specific field (Snyder, 2019).  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13

14 Compared with traditional narrative reviews, SLR offers a more rigorous methodology  
15 through the application of predefined search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and  
16 quality assessment procedures. This approach reduces researcher bias and enhances the  
17 reliability of findings by ensuring that the review process is conducted systematically and  
18 transparently (Paul & Criado, 2020). Furthermore, systematic reviews are increasingly  
19 recognized as an essential methodological approach for generating evidence-based conclusions  
20 and advancing theoretical development in the social sciences and educational research (Donthu  
21 et al., 2021).  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33

34 The present review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and  
35 Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines developed by Page et al. (2021). PRISMA provides  
36 a standardized framework for identifying, screening, assessing, and synthesizing relevant  
37 studies, thereby improving the transparency and methodological rigor of review-based  
38 research. The use of PRISMA has become a common practice in high-impact journals indexed  
39 in Scopus and Web of Science because it facilitates reproducibility and strengthens the  
40 credibility of review findings (Page et al., 2021).  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

51 The review focused on empirical studies published between 2020 and 2026 that  
52 investigated emotional intelligence and its relationship with intercultural adaptation,  
53 psychological adjustment, sociocultural adaptation, or related adaptation outcomes among  
54 university students. The selected time frame was chosen to capture the most recent  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65

developments in emotional intelligence research, particularly in the context of the growing internationalization of higher education and increasing global student mobility (Zabrodskaia & Wang, 2025; Zhao et al., 2026).

To achieve the objectives of the study, the review addressed the following research questions:

1. RQ1: How has emotional intelligence been conceptualized and measured in studies of university students' intercultural adaptation?
2. RQ2: What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological adaptation among university students in multicultural educational contexts?
3. RQ3: What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and sociocultural adaptation among university students in multicultural educational contexts?
4. RQ4: What theoretical, methodological, and contextual gaps remain in the current literature, and what directions should future research pursue?

By addressing these questions, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional role of emotional intelligence in intercultural adaptation while proposing future research directions that may contribute to the advancement of theory and practice in international higher education.

## **Search Strategy**

A comprehensive literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and intercultural adaptation among university students. To ensure extensive coverage of high-quality academic publications, the search was performed across several internationally recognized databases, including Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and Wiley Online Library. These databases were selected because they contain peer-reviewed publications from

1 leading journals in education, psychology, intercultural studies, and higher education research  
2 (Donthu et al., 2021).  
3

4 A database-specific search strategy was developed for Scopus, Web of Science,  
5 ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and Wiley Online Library. Searches  
6 were conducted between January and March 2026 and were limited to peer-reviewed English-  
7 language articles published from January 2020 to March 2026. The complete search strings  
8 used for each database, together with search dates, limits, and any database-specific syntax or  
9 controlled vocabulary terms, are provided in Appendix A. This period was selected because  
10 research on emotional intelligence and intercultural adaptation has expanded considerably in  
11 recent years, particularly in response to increasing international student mobility and the  
12 globalization of higher education (Zabrodskaia & Wang, 2025; Zhao et al., 2026).  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

26 A combination of keywords and Boolean operators was used to maximize the retrieval  
27 of relevant studies. The search terms were developed based on the main constructs investigated  
28 in this review, namely emotional intelligence and intercultural adaptation. The following search  
29 string was applied shown in the Appendix (Table 2):  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35

36 ("emotional intelligence" OR "emotional competence" OR "emotional skills")

37  
38 AND  
39

40 ("intercultural adaptation" OR "cross-cultural adaptation" OR "cultural adjustment" OR  
41 "intercultural adjustment")  
42  
43  
44

45 AND  
46

47 ("higher education" OR "university students" OR "college students" OR "international  
48 students")  
49  
50  
51

52 To broaden the scope of the search, additional related terms were incorporated, including:  
53 Psychological adaptation; Sociocultural adaptation; Academic adjustment; International  
54 student adjustment; Intercultural competence; Cultural intelligence; Student mobility. The  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65

search strategy was refined iteratively to improve relevance and reduce the retrieval of unrelated studies. Reference lists of selected articles were also manually examined to identify additional studies that may not have been captured through database searches. This snowballing technique has been recommended as an effective approach for increasing the comprehensiveness of systematic reviews (Snyder, 2019). All retrieved records were exported into reference management software, where duplicate publications were identified and removed before the screening process. The remaining articles were then subjected to title, abstract, and full-text screening according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria established for this review.

By employing multiple databases, comprehensive keyword combinations, and manual reference screening, the search strategy aimed to minimize publication bias and ensure the inclusion of the most relevant and high-quality empirical evidence concerning emotional intelligence and intercultural adaptation in higher education.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

To ensure the relevance, quality, and consistency of the reviewed literature, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to the screening process. The application of predefined criteria is essential in systematic reviews because it reduces selection bias and enhances the transparency and reproducibility of the review process (Snyder, 2019; Page et al., 2021). The criteria were developed based on the objectives of this study, which focused on examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and intercultural adaptation among university students in higher education settings. Inclusion Criteria: 1) The study examined emotional intelligence as a primary or significant variable. 2) The study investigated intercultural adaptation, cross-cultural adaptation, psychological adaptation, sociocultural adaptation, or related adjustment outcomes. 3) The participants were university students, college students, or international students enrolled in higher education institutions. 4) The study

employed quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research designs. 5) The article was published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. 6) The article was written in English. 7) The publication date ranged from January 2020 to March 2026. 8) The full text of the article was accessible for evaluation and analysis. These criteria ensured that the selected studies were directly relevant to the research objectives and represented contemporary developments in the field. Exclusion Criteria: 1) The study focused on elementary, secondary, or vocational education students rather than higher education populations. 2) The study examined emotional intelligence in workplace, organizational, or clinical settings without reference to university students. 3) The publication was a conference proceeding, editorial, book chapter, dissertation, thesis, commentary, or non-peer-reviewed document. 4) The study did not investigate adaptation-related outcomes. 5) The article lacked sufficient methodological information or empirical evidence. 6) The publication was duplicated across databases. 7) The full-text article was unavailable.

These exclusion criteria were intended to maintain methodological rigor and ensure that only empirical evidence directly relevant to the review objectives was included.

### **Screening Procedure**

The screening process was conducted in three sequential stages following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

Stage 1. Title Screening: The titles of all retrieved records were reviewed to eliminate clearly irrelevant publications. Studies unrelated to emotional intelligence, intercultural adaptation, or higher education were removed at this stage.

Stage 2 Abstract Screening: The abstracts of the remaining articles were examined to assess their relevance to the review objectives. Studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

1 Stage 3 Full-Text Assessment: Articles that passed the abstract screening were subjected to full-  
2 text review. During this stage, studies were evaluated comprehensively against all inclusion  
3 and exclusion criteria. Only studies that satisfied all criteria were retained for the final  
4 synthesis.  
5  
6  
7  
8

9 This multi-stage screening procedure ensured a systematic and transparent selection of  
10 studies while minimizing the risk of including irrelevant or low-quality publications.  
11  
12  
13

### 14 **Quality Assurance**

15

16 To improve the reliability of the selection process, each article was evaluated based on  
17 methodological quality, clarity of research design, sample adequacy, measurement validity, and  
18 relevance to the review objectives. Studies demonstrating significant methodological  
19 weaknesses or insufficient reporting were excluded from the final dataset.  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24

25 The implementation of these inclusion and exclusion criteria contributed to the  
26 development of a robust evidence base for understanding the role of emotional intelligence in  
27 facilitating psychological and sociocultural adaptation among university students in  
28 multicultural higher education environments.  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35

### 36 **Study Selection Process**

37

38 Records retrieved from all databases were exported to reference management software,  
39 where duplicates were removed. Two reviewers independently screened titles and abstracts  
40 against the prespecified inclusion and exclusion criteria, followed by full-text assessment of  
41 potentially eligible articles. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and, when  
42 necessary, consultation with a third reviewer. The selection process is reported in accordance  
43 with PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021).  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52

### 53 **Identification Stage**

54

55 The initial search across the selected databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect,  
56 SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and Wiley Online Library) yielded 1,247 records.  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65

1 These records were identified using predefined search strings related to emotional intelligence,  
2 intercultural adaptation, and higher education.  
3

4 Subsequently, all records were exported into reference management software for organization  
5 and duplicate removal. During this stage, 285 duplicate articles were identified and removed,  
6 leaving 962 unique records for further evaluation.  
7  
8  
9

## 10 **Screening Stage**

11 The titles and abstracts of the remaining 962 studies were screened against the predetermined  
12 inclusion and exclusion criteria.  
13

14 Studies were excluded if they: 1) Focused on non-higher education populations. 2) Did not  
15 investigate emotional intelligence. 3) Did not address adaptation-related outcomes. 4) Were  
16 non-empirical publications.  
17  
18

19 As a result, 779 studies were excluded during the screening stage, leaving 183 articles  
20 eligible for full-text assessment.  
21  
22

## 23 **Eligibility Stage**

24 The full texts of the 183 remaining studies were carefully examined to determine their  
25 suitability for inclusion in the review. At this stage, studies were excluded for several reasons,  
26 including: 1) Lack of direct examination of emotional intelligence and adaptation. 2)  
27 Insufficient methodological information. 3) Inaccessible full texts. 4) Inappropriate study  
28 populations. 5) Failure to meet quality assessment standards. Following this evaluation, 131  
29 articles were excluded.  
30  
31

## 32 **Inclusion Stage**

33 After completing the eligibility assessment and quality evaluation, 52 studies met all  
34 inclusion criteria and were retained for the final review and synthesis. These studies constituted  
35 the evidence base for analyzing the relationship between emotional intelligence and  
36 intercultural adaptation among university students.  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65

## PRISMA Flow Summary

Table 1 presents the summary of the study selection process.

**Table 1. PRISMA Study Selection Process**

| Selection Stage                                     | Number of Records |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Records identified through database searching       | 1,247             |
| Duplicate records removed                           | 285               |
| Records screened                                    | 962               |
| Records excluded after title and abstract screening | 779               |
| Full-text articles assessed for eligibility         | 183               |
| Full-text articles excluded                         | 131               |
| Studies included in final review                    | 52                |

The study selection process can be illustrated as follows:

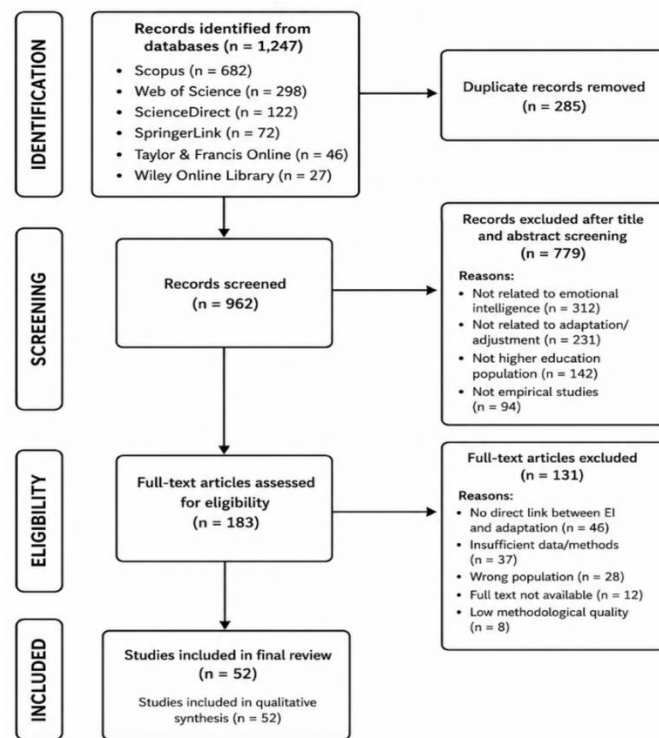


**Figure 1. Study Selection Process of Emotional Intelligence and Intercultural Adaptation in Higher Education**

1 The adoption of the PRISMA framework enhances the transparency of the review  
2 process and enables readers to evaluate the comprehensiveness and reliability of the evidence  
3 synthesis. Such methodological transparency is considered a fundamental requirement for  
4 systematic review studies published in high-impact Scopus-indexed journals (Page et al., 2021;  
5 Paul & Criado, 2020)

## 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 **Quality Assessment**

13 All included studies were assessed for methodological quality based on the  
14 appropriateness of the research design, sample adequacy, validity and reliability of the  
15 instruments used, rigor of data analysis, and consistency between the reported findings and  
16 conclusions. Studies with major reporting deficiencies or serious methodological limitations  
17 were excluded from the final synthesis. A summary of the quality appraisal is provided in  
18 Appendix B. However, several common limitations were identified, including the  
19 predominance of cross-sectional designs and the extensive use of self-report measures, which  
20 may limit causal inference and increase the risk of response bias (Mahoney et al., 2018; Nanda  
21 et al., 2025).

22 Despite these limitations, the overall quality of the selected studies was considered  
23 adequate to support a comprehensive synthesis of the relationship between emotional  
24 intelligence and intercultural adaptation among university students.

## 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 **Data Extraction and Data Analysis**

47 Data were extracted using a standardized form that captured authors, year of  
48 publication, country, research design, sample size, participant characteristics, measurement  
49 instruments, key variables, analytical approach, and principal findings related to emotional  
50 intelligence and intercultural adaptation. Data extraction was conducted independently by two  
51 reviewers, and disagreements were resolved through consensus. The extracted findings were  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65

1 synthesized thematically in three steps: initial coding of recurring findings, grouping of codes  
2 into candidate themes, and refinement of these themes into final analytical categories. Where  
3  
4 studies reported separate evidence for psychological and sociocultural adaptation, these  
5  
6 outcomes were analyzed separately before being integrated into the final narrative synthesis  
7  
8 (Thomas & Harden, 2008;Arbués et al., 2025). The analysis focused on categorizing findings  
9  
10 into major thematic areas, including emotional intelligence and psychological adaptation,  
11  
12 emotional intelligence and sociocultural adaptation, cross-cultural perspectives, and emerging  
13  
14 research trends.  
15  
16  
17

18  
19 In addition, a narrative synthesis was conducted to integrate and interpret findings from  
20  
21 studies with diverse methodological approaches. This process enabled the identification of  
22  
23 consistent findings, theoretical developments, and research gaps within the literature. Through  
24  
25 this analytical approach, the review provides a comprehensive understanding of how emotional  
26  
27 intelligence contributes to intercultural adaptation among university students in higher  
28  
29 education contexts.  
30  
31  
32

## 33 34 **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### 35 36 **Characteristics of Included Studies**

37  
38 Fifty-two studies, published 2020-2026, met the inclusion criteria. Most were  
39  
40 conducted in Asia - particularly countries with high international student mobility - followed  
41  
42 by Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Australia.(Zabrodskaia & Wang, 2025Zhao et  
43  
44 al., 2026  
45  
46  
47

48  
49 Quantitative approaches dominated, with most studies using surveys and SEM, CFA,  
50  
51 regression, or mediation analysis. Few used qualitative or mixed-method designs.  
52

53  
54 Studies generally treated EI as multidimensional (perception, understanding, regulation,  
55  
56 utilization) and adaptation as psychological or sociocultural, consistent with Ward and  
57  
58 Kennedy (1999).  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65

Findings show growing consensus on EI's importance for adaptation, though methodological variation remains. The 52 studies are listed in the Appendix.

Table 1 (Appendix 1) summarizes the 52 studies, drawn from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Australia, and North America.

Most studies came from China, Southeast Asia, and Türkiye, with Africa and Latin America underrepresented - indicating a need for broader cross-regional research.

Most focused on international students; some included domestic students in multicultural settings, signaling EI's relevance for both groups.

Findings consistently show a positive EI-adaptation relationship: higher EI is associated with better well-being, stronger resilience, lower acculturative stress, and more successful sociocultural adjustment.

A clear trend is the shift from unidimensional to multidimensional treatment of EI. Regulation most often predicted psychological adaptation, while perception and utilization were more closely linked to sociocultural adaptation and interpersonal effectiveness.

Limitations include reliance on cross-sectional designs and self-report, restricting causal inference; longitudinal, mixed-method, and experimental studies are scarce.

Overall, the studies confirm EI's importance in higher education but reveal the need for stronger frameworks, more rigorous methods, and greater geographical diversity.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Adaptation**

EI is consistently positively associated with psychological adaptation - well-being, life satisfaction, resilience, and stress management - especially critical for international students.

Higher EI helps students cope with intercultural transitions by enabling recognition of emotional experiences, accurate interpretation of stressors, and regulation of responses, resulting in lower anxiety, homesickness, loneliness, and acculturative stress.

Emotional regulation emerged as the strongest predictor. Gebregergis et al. (2020) found EI indirectly reduced depressive symptoms by lowering acculturative stress, and other studies show EI enhances academic resilience in cross-cultural contexts.(Mugabekazi, 2026)

Emotional understanding also contributes by supporting accurate interpretation of emotional experiences and effective coping, especially in multicultural environments requiring flexibility.

EI further acts as a protective resource: emotionally intelligent international students show lower vulnerability and higher well-being in EMI environments in Southeast Asia, and EI improves coping and mental-health outcomes (Wang & Chiu, 2024).(Xue, 2026)

Overall, evidence strongly supports EI's role in psychological adaptation; longitudinal research is needed to clarify causal mechanisms.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Sociocultural Adaptation**

EI also contributes substantially to sociocultural adaptation - communicating, building relationships, understanding cultural norms, and participating in daily life within a new culture (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

Students with higher EI face fewer difficulties in intercultural interactions, recognize emotional cues, take diverse perspectives, and respond with cultural sensitivity, supporting stronger relationships and integration.

Emotional perception emerged as one of the strongest predictors of sociocultural adaptation, enhancing empathy, interpersonal sensitivity, and communication, and helping students avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings (Qi et al., 2026).(Kocaturk et al., 2026)

Emotional utilization was also linked to positive sociocultural outcomes by supporting strategic use of emotions in problem-solving and behavioral adjustment to social expectations.(Wang et al., 2026)

Emotional competencies improve international students' ability to build social connections and adjust to host environments, and intercultural-competence interventions support adaptation and integration.(Zhao et al., 2026)Ramstrand et al. (2024)

Sociocultural adaptation is also shaped by language proficiency, cultural distance, social support, and prior international experience, so EI is one element within a broader network of resources (; ).(Yücekayalar et al., 2026)(Deschner-Warner, 2026)

Overall, EI - especially perception and utilization - is a valuable interpersonal resource for intercultural communication, social integration, and behavioral adjustment.

### **Research Gaps and Future Directions**

Several gaps remain despite the clear positive EI-adaptation relationship.

First, cross-sectional designs dominate; longitudinal research is needed to track EI's effects on adaptation trajectories.

Second, self-report reliance introduces social-desirability bias and common-method variance; behavioral, peer, and performance-based measures should be added.

Third, evidence is concentrated in East Asia, Europe, and North America; ASEAN, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America remain under-studied.

Fourth, many studies treat EI as a global construct; the dimensions should be examined separately against specific outcomes.

Finally, integrated models combining EI with cultural intelligence, intercultural competence, social support, resilience, and language proficiency would support more comprehensive frameworks.

Addressing these gaps will strengthen theory and provide practical guidance. The next section presents the implications.

## **THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **Theoretical Implications**

1 This review synthesizes contemporary evidence on EI and intercultural adaptation. It  
2 reinforces EI as a multidimensional construct: regulation and understanding are more strongly  
3 associated with psychological adaptation, while perception and utilization play a greater role  
4 in sociocultural adaptation - extending EI theory by showing that emotional competencies  
5 operate through multiple adaptive pathways in multicultural educational contexts.  
6  
7

8  
9  
10  
11  
12 Second, the review supports integrating EI within intercultural adaptation frameworks.  
13 While prior models emphasized cultural, social, and environmental factors, individual  
14 emotional resources are a key mechanism through which students manage transitions and  
15 intercultural interactions.  
16  
17

18  
19  
20  
21  
22 Third, EI appears to function as a relatively universal adaptation resource. Although  
23 cultural norms shape emotional expression and behavior, the positive EI-adaptation  
24 relationship was observed consistently across regions, supporting further cross-cultural  
25 investigation.  
26  
27

28  
29  
30  
31 Finally, future research should move beyond direct-effect models to explore mediating  
32 and moderating variables such as cultural intelligence, resilience, social support, intercultural  
33 competence, and language proficiency.  
34  
35

### 36 37 38 39 **Practical Implications**

40  
41 The findings have important implications for institutions. Given the positive EI-  
42 adaptation relationship, universities should treat EI development as integral to student support  
43 and internationalization strategies.  
44  
45

46  
47  
48 First, EI training should be embedded in orientation programs. Workshops on emotional  
49 awareness, regulation, empathy, and intercultural communication help students manage  
50 cultural transitions.  
51  
52

53  
54  
55 Second, mentoring and peer-support initiatives provide authentic settings for practicing  
56 emotional competencies and expanding social support networks.  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65

1 Third, advisors, counselors, and student-affairs professionals should recognize emotional  
2 adjustment challenges; embedding EI principles in counseling strengthens resilience and well-  
3 being.  
4  
5

6  
7 Fourth, institutions should recognize that adaptation extends beyond academic  
8 performance. Policies fostering emotional well-being, intercultural engagement, and social  
9 integration support overall student success.  
10  
11  
12

13  
14 Together, these implications position EI as both a theoretical construct and a practical  
15 resource that can be cultivated in an increasingly globalized higher education landscape.  
16  
17  
18

## 19 **CONCLUSION**

20

21 This systematic review examined EI's role in facilitating psychological and sociocultural  
22 adaptation among university students. Across studies published 2020-2026, EI emerges as a  
23 significant predictor of successful intercultural adaptation.  
24  
25  
26

27 EI contributes to both dimensions but through different competencies. Regulation and  
28 understanding were more strongly associated with psychological adaptation (resilience, well-  
29 being, stress management); perception and utilization played a greater role in sociocultural  
30 adaptation by supporting communication, relationships, and integration.  
31  
32  
33

34 EI functions as a valuable personal resource across diverse cultural contexts; emotionally  
35 intelligent students consistently showed greater capacity to cope with intercultural challenges.  
36  
37  
38

39 Limitations include cross-sectional designs, self-report reliance, and limited regional  
40 representation, highlighting the need for longitudinal, multi-method, and cross-cultural studies.  
41  
42  
43

44 Overall, EI is a strategic resource for promoting student well-being, intercultural  
45 competence, and adaptation. Future research and institutional initiatives should continue  
46 developing emotional competencies to support student success in multicultural environments.  
47  
48  
49

## 50 **LIMITATIONS OF THE REVIEW**

51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65

This review has limitations. First, only English-language peer-reviewed studies were included. Second, coverage was limited to 2020-2026, potentially omitting earlier foundational studies. Third, findings depend on the quality of included studies, many cross-sectional and self-report. Fourth, Africa, Latin America, and several developing countries remain underrepresented, limiting generalizability.

These limitations should be considered when interpreting findings and underscore the need for future longitudinal, multi-method, and cross-cultural studies.

## RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

This review makes several contributions: it synthesizes contemporary evidence on EI and intercultural adaptation; demonstrates EI as a multidimensional construct with dimensions contributing to distinct outcomes; identifies key methodological and theoretical gaps; and proposes directions for future research and practical recommendations for higher education institutions.

## REFERENCES

- Aldosari, M. S., & Alsager, H. N. (2026). Emotional Intelligence and Cognitive Flexibility as Predictors of Academic Success and Adaptation Outcomes Among International Students in Saudi Universities. *Journal of Intelligence*, 14(5). <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence14050088>.
- Arbués, E., Abad-Villaverde, B., Costa-París, A., Balaguer, Á., Conesa-Lareo, M. D., & Beltramo, C. (2025). Socio-Emotional Competencies for Sustainable Development: An Exploratory Review. *Education Sciences*, 15(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15070831>.
- Deng, J., Marshall, T., & Imada, T. (2025). Cultural intelligence, acculturation, adaptation and emotional displays of other-condemning emotions and self-conscious emotions among Chinese

international students in the UK. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 105.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2025.102157>.

Deschner-Warner, J. (2026). *2\_NG\_Sci\_Rev\_4\_Deschner-Warner*. 4.

Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N., & Lim, W. M. (2021). How to conduct a bibliometric analysis: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 133, 285–296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.04.070>.

Ismail, T., Irawan, A., & Salam, R. (2026). Cultural intelligence and performance: a bibliometric analysis of individual and organizational outcomes (2005–2025). In *Cogent Business and Management* (Vol. 13, Number 1). Cogent OA. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2026.2663203>.

Jagers, R. J., Rivas-Drake, D., & Williams, B. (2019). Transformative Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): Toward SEL in Service of Educational Equity and Excellence. *Educational Psychologist*, 54(3), 162–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1623032>.

Jagers, R. J., Skoog-Hoffman, A., Barthelus, B., & Schlund, J. (2021). *Transformative Social Emotional Learning In Pursuit of Educational Equity and Excellence*.

Kitchenham, B. (2007). *Guidelines for performing Systematic Literature Reviews in Software Engineering*.

Kocaturk, M. , Ergin-Kocaturk, H., T. E. , Su, A. , Isayeva, R. , & Karadag, E. (2026). 2026. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2026.2627523>.

MacCann, C., Double, K. S., & Clarke, I. E. (2022). Lower Avoidant Coping Mediates the Relationship of Emotional Intelligence With Well-Being and Ill-Being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.835819>.

1 Mahoney, J. L., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2018). An update on social and emotional learning  
2 outcome research. In *Phi Delta Kappan* (Vol. 100, Number 4).  
3

4  
5 Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997). *mayer 1997*.  
6

7  
8 Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2008). Emotional Intelligence: New Ability or Eclectic  
9 Traits? *American Psychologist*, 63(6), 503–517. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.63.6.503>.  
10  
11

12  
13  
14 Mugabekazi, J. C. (2026). Emotional Intelligence and Academic Resilience Among International  
15 Students in Cross-Cultural Contexts. *Journal of International Students*, 16(4), 1–16.  
16  
17 <https://doi.org/10.32674/13977d49>.  
18  
19

20  
21  
22 Nanda, S. B., Satapathy, D., Panda, G., & Pradhan, D. K. (2025). Socio-emotional learning and  
23 competencies in 21st-century education: a systematic review of teacher and student  
24 perspectives. In *Discover Education* (Vol. 4, Number 1). Discover.  
25  
26 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-025-00796-w>.  
27  
28

29  
30  
31  
32 Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer,  
33 L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M.,  
34  
35 Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., ... Moher,  
36  
37 D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic  
38 reviews. In *BMJ* (Vol. 372). BMJ Publishing Group. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>.  
39  
40  
41  
42

43  
44  
45 Paul, J., & Criado, A. R. (2020). The art of writing literature review: What do we know and what do  
46 we need to know? *International Business Review*, 29(4).  
47  
48 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2020.101717>.  
49  
50

51  
52  
53 Qi, W., Shukri, M., Yajid, A., & Tham, J. (2026). *Advances in Consumer Research Integrating*  
54  
55 *Cultural Intelligence, Language Proficiency, and Emotional Intelligence in Explaining Cross-*  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65

*Cultural Adaptation: The Mediating Role of Psychological Adaptation among International Students in Jiangxi Universities* (Vol. 3).

- Ramstrand, N., Weisova, L., Nylander, E., & Johansson, A. (2024). Interventions and evaluation of intercultural competence of students enrolled in higher education—a scoping review. In *Education Inquiry*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2024.2344871>.
- Shi, J. (2026). *International Student Experiences in Australian Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83662-226-0>.
- Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333–339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>.
- Soheili, F., & Lanz, M. (2025). Psychological adaptation of international students in higher education: a bibliometric analysis. *Current Psychology*, 44(11), 10670–10678. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-025-07926-5>.
- Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45>.
- Wang, Q., Mohd Shukri Ab Yajid, M. S. A. Y., & Tham, J. (2026). Impact of cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence on cross-cultural adaptation: A literature review on the mediating mechanism of psychological adaptation GAS Journal of Education and Literature (GASJEL) Impact of Cultural Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence on Cross-Cultural Adaptation: A Literature Review on the Mediating Mechanism of Psychological Adaptation the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0). *GAS Journal of Education and Literature (GASJEL)*, 3(4), 2026. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19388264>.

- Xue, W. (2026). Psychological Vulnerability and Well-Being of Chinese International Students in Southeast Asia's EMI Contexts: A Systematic Review. *Journal of International Students*, 16(3), 151–172. <https://doi.org/10.32674/G6YM7704>.
- Yücekayalar, A., Gedikoğlu, T., & Kılıç, M. Y. (2026). The Mediating Role of Internationalization in Higher Education in the Relationship Between Cultural Intelligence and Intercultural Sensitivity. *Sustainability*, 18(2), 558. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su18020558>.
- Zabrodskaia, A., & Wang, J. (2025). Editorial: Intercultural communication and international students. In *Frontiers in Communication* (Vol. 10). Frontiers Media SA. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1729136>.
- Zhai, Y., Xiong, Y., Almaawali, M., Tian, X., & Du, X. (2025). National trends of mental health and service utilisation among international students in the USA, 2015–2024. *General Psychiatry*, 38(5). <https://doi.org/10.1136/gpsych-2025-102124>.
- Zhang, W., Peng, Q., Chen, J., & Zhang, H. (2026). The relationship between acculturative stress and depression among international students in China: a moderated chain mediation model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1782600>.
- Zhao, W., Razak, N. A. A., & Nor, A. M. (2026). Acculturation Experiences among Chinese International Students: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Studies. *Journal of International Students*, 16(14), 313–340. <https://doi.org/10.32674/chh31297>.
- Zheng, W. (2025). Feelings About Intercultural Development: A Review of Research on International Students' Intercultural Adjustment Experiences From an Emotion Perspective. In *ECNU Review of Education*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20965311241305141>.

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65

## Appendix

**Table 1. List of 52 Studies Selected as Reviewed Articles**

| No. | Author(s) and Year        | Country/Region          | Sample                 | Main Findings                                                                         |
|-----|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Aldosari & Alsager (2026) | Saudi Arabia            | International students | Emotional intelligence positively predicted academic success and adaptation outcomes. |
| 2   | Mugabekazi, (2026)        | Cross-cultural contexts | International students | Emotional intelligence enhanced academic resilience and psychological adjustment.     |

| No. | Author(s) and Year         | Country/Region        | Sample                           | Main Findings                                                                                                                         |
|-----|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3   | Qi et al. (2026)           | China                 | International students           | Psychological adaptation mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and cross-cultural adaptation.                      |
| 4   | Wang et al. (2026)         | Global                | Review studies                   | Emotional intelligence significantly contributed to cross-cultural adaptation.                                                        |
| 5   | Kocaturk et al. (2026)     | Türkiye               | International students           | Sociocultural adaptation was influenced by emotional and cultural factors.                                                            |
| 6   | Xue (2026)                 | Southeast Asia        | Chinese international students   | Emotional intelligence reduced psychological vulnerability and improved well-being.                                                   |
| 7   | Zabrodskaia & Wang. (2025) | International context | International students           | Effective intercultural communication enhanced adaptation outcomes.                                                                   |
| 8   | Zhai et al. (2025)         | United States         | International students           | Psychological well-being was strongly associated with successful adaptation.                                                          |
| 9   | Yücekayalar et al. (2026)  | Türkiye               | University students              | Cultural intelligence and intercultural sensitivity supported student adaptation.                                                     |
| 10  | Zhao et al. (2026)         | China–Malaysia        | International students           | Social support and emotional competencies improved intercultural adjustment.                                                          |
| 11  | Ramstrand et al. (2024)    | Europe                | Higher education students        | Intercultural competence interventions improved adaptation and social integration.                                                    |
| 12  | (Shi, 2026)                | Australia             | International students           | Cross-cultural skills and emotional intelligence facilitated successful adaptation experiences.                                       |
| 13  | Deschner-Warner (2026)     | Europe                | University students              | Cultural intelligence contributed to intercultural learning and adaptation.                                                           |
| 14  | Soheili & Lanz (2025)      | International context | International students           | Emotional competencies reduced intercultural stress and facilitated successful intercultural adjustment among international students. |
| 15  | Ismail et al. (2026)       | Global                | Literature review                | Cultural intelligence positively influenced adaptation and performance outcomes.                                                      |
| 16  | Soheili & Lanz (2025)      | International context | International students           | Emotional competencies reduced intercultural stress and enhanced adaptation.                                                          |
| 17  | MacCann et al. (2022)      | Australia             | 220 university student           | Emotional intelligence improved adaptive coping, enhancing psychological well-being.                                                  |
| 18  | Zhang et al. (2026)        | China                 | 320 international students       | <b>Acculturative stress increased depression, mediated by resilience and coping styles.</b>                                           |
| 19  | Zheng (2025)               | China                 | 52 published studies (1992–2022) | Emotion plays an important role in international students' intercultural and sociocultural adjustment.                                |

| No. | Author(s) and Year                              | Country/Region                                       | Sample                                           | Main Findings                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 20  | Deng et al. (2025)                              | United Kingdom                                       | 161 Chinese international students               | Cultural intelligence enhanced sociocultural and psychological adaptation while reducing acculturative stress, which in turn lowered negative emotional expression..                                |
| 21  | Tasneem, Vashisth & Tanwar (2025)               | Multicultural context (multiple universities)        | 384 undergraduate and postgraduate students      | Emotional intelligence (EI) had a substantial impact on mental health and cross-cultural adaptability; intercultural adaptation moderated the relationship between EI and psychological well-being. |
| 22  | Tasneem, Vashisth & Tanwar (2025)               | Multicultural context (multiple universities)        | 384 undergraduate and postgraduate students      | EI functioned as both a mediator and moderator between multicultural stressors (cultural adjustment, communication, and social integration) and psychological well-being.                           |
| 23  | Rean & Wang (2024)                              | Russia (Chinese students at Russian universities)    | 90 Chinese students                              | EI components, particularly understanding and managing emotions, significantly influenced students' socio-psychological adaptation in a foreign-language environment.                               |
| 24  | Cho & Ulwiyah (2020)                            | China                                                | 233 students (122 domestic, 111 international)   | EI was positively associated with intercultural sensitivity (52.5% predictive power); international students demonstrated higher levels of EI and intercultural sensitivity.                        |
| 25  | Khan, Wang, Malik & Ganiyu (2020)               | International context                                | 202 international students                       | EI and cultural intelligence (CQ) were significantly associated with academic performance; cultural adjustment mediated the relationship between EI and academic performance.                       |
| 26  | Berrios Callejas (2025)                         | International context (theoretical study)            | Theoretical literature analysis                  | High EI combined with metacognitive awareness was associated with greater resilience to culture shock; a four-profile adaptation model was proposed.                                                |
| 27  | Silalahi (2022)                                 | Indonesia                                            | 11 international students                        | EI and cultural intelligence played a critical role in enabling international students to achieve successful social integration.                                                                    |
| 28  | Lytvynenko (2026)                               | International context (theoretical–empirical review) | Cross-disciplinary literature review             | EI operated through psychological and cross-cultural adaptation processes as a transformational mechanism, with cross-cultural competence serving as a key mediator.                                |
| 29  | Sundaramoorthy et al. (2024)                    | India (cross-state educational context)              | University students                              | EI was positively associated with cross-cultural adaptation among Indian university students in inter-state educational settings.                                                                   |
| 30  | D'Souza, Dechpanprasong, Chan & Ornlakor (2023) | Thailand                                             | 426 students (Thai, Chinese, and ASEAN students) | Sociocultural adaptation mediated the relationship between cultural intelligence and academic achievement; CQ did not directly predict academic                                                     |

| No. | Author(s) and Year                   | Country/Region                                                 | Sample                                                                                    | Main Findings                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     |                                      |                                                                |                                                                                           | performance without cultural adaptation as a mediator.                                                                                                                                      |
| 31  | Rana, Bhasin & Mushtaq (2020)        | India                                                          | International students in India                                                           | Behavioral CQ had a direct positive effect on psychological adaptability; overall CQ levels among international students were relatively low.                                               |
| 32  | Purev et al. (2025)                  | Asia                                                           | University students                                                                       | EI was positively correlated with psychological adaptability; emotional skills facilitated adjustment to new environments.                                                                  |
| 33  | Ibrahim et al. (2025)                | Kuwait                                                         | 400 undergraduate students (200 males, 200 females)                                       | A significant positive correlation was found between EI and academic adjustment ( $r = 0.62, p < .01$ ); EI increased across academic years, and female students reported higher EI levels. |
| 34  | Saini & Tyagi (2024)                 | India (Maa Shakumbhari University)                             | University students                                                                       | Strong correlations were identified between EI and multidimensional adjustment, including home, health, social, emotional, and academic adjustment.                                         |
| 35  | Polancos et al. (2025)               | Philippines (Mindanao State University, Marawi City)           | 375 students                                                                              | EI was positively associated with adaptability to cultural diversity; ethnicity influenced both EI and adaptability.                                                                        |
| 36  | Huerta et al. (2026)                 | Peru                                                           | 276 students (quantitative) and 12 interview participants (qualitative)                   | EI indirectly influenced GPA through emotion regulation strategies such as cognitive reframing and social support, which facilitated adaptation.                                            |
| 37  | Arghode, Lakshmanan & Nafukho (2022) | International context (literature review)                      | Review of studies from multiple databases                                                 | EI was identified as a foundational component of intercultural competence development; higher EI contributed to stronger intercultural competence.                                          |
| 38  | Lilova-Zhelyazkova & Ilieva (2026)   | Bulgaria–China (Trakia University–BIT Zhuhai mobility program) | Undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students participating in a two-week winter program | Emotion regulation played a central role in developing intercultural competence; structured short-term academic exchanges promoted stable behavioral adaptation and psychological safety.   |
| 39  | Kovalkova & Mandzii (2026)           | Eastern Europe                                                 | Higher education students                                                                 | Higher EI enhanced adaptability, whereas lower EI increased the risk of maladaptation; EI training improved psychological stability and self-regulation.                                    |
| 40  | Salsabila & Sartika (2024)           | Indonesia                                                      | 91 exchange students                                                                      | Cultural intelligence had a significant positive effect on students' cross-cultural adjustment.                                                                                             |
| 41  | Kuprina et al. (2022)                | Russia                                                         | Humanities and economics students                                                         | EI contributed to the development of emotional-intercultural competence and accelerated adaptation to new                                                                                   |

| No. | Author(s) and Year                           | Country/Region                                         | Sample                                                             | Main Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     |                                              |                                                        |                                                                    | environments; intercultural interactions influenced students' psychological characteristics.                                                                                                                                                  |
| 42  | Hong, Ng & Lai (2021)                        | Malaysia (Universiti Putra Malaysia)                   | 194 international students                                         | Cultural intelligence significantly predicted cross-cultural adjustment, with openness to experience emerging as the strongest predictor of CQ.                                                                                               |
| 43  | Putra, Sujadi, Bustami & Indra (2022)        | Indonesia (IAIN Kerinci)                               | 85 first-year students from outside the region                     | EI had a significant negative effect on culture shock ( $\beta = -0.513$ , $p = .000$ ); resilience mediated the relationship between EI and culture shock.                                                                                   |
| 44  | Mugabekazi (2026)                            | China (international PhD students in China)            | Reflective self-narrative study of international doctoral students | EI supported academic resilience, emotion regulation, and supportive social relationships amid pressure and isolation in cross-cultural contexts; integration of EI into university support services was recommended.                         |
| 45  | Mahmood, Malik, Fatima & Parveen (2026)      | Pakistan (multiple universities)                       | 520 students using stratified sampling                             | EI significantly reduced academic stress; adaptive coping mediated 24% of the variance, while social support significantly moderated the EI–stress relationship.                                                                              |
| 46  | Iftakhar (2022)                              | United Kingdom (Pakistani students in UK universities) | 300 Pakistani students                                             | EI and cultural intelligence negatively predicted acculturative stress, with CQ emerging as the strongest negative predictor.                                                                                                                 |
| 47  | Zhu & Lin (2025)                             | South Korea (Chinese students)                         | 232 Chinese international students                                 | Emotion regulation was positively associated with school adjustment; peer relationships mediated the relationship between emotion regulation and adjustment, highlighting the role of emotional skills in fostering supportive peer networks. |
| 48  | Amente & Zeleke (2024)                       | Ethiopia (Ambo University)                             | 476 students (244 males, 232 females)                              | Social intelligence and psychological adjustment significantly influenced intercultural competence; together with other variables, they explained 70.4% of the variance in intercultural competence.                                          |
| 49  | Park (2024)                                  | South Korea (Seoul and Gyeonggi Province)              | 301 university students                                            | EI significantly influenced cultural competence and learning engagement; both variables sequentially mediated the relationship between EI and career decision-making self-efficacy.                                                           |
| 50  | Awasthi et al. (2022)                        | India (Varanasi; international female students)        | 100 international female students                                  | Adaptive emotion regulation strategies were associated with lower acculturative stress and higher well-being, whereas maladaptive strategies predicted greater stress.                                                                        |
| 51  | Augusto-Landa, García-Martínez & León (2022) | Spain (University of Jaén)                             | 567 university students                                            | EI exerted both direct and indirect effects (through coping strategies) on anxiety, depression, and stress.                                                                                                                                   |

| No. | Author(s) and Year                                         | Country/Region | Sample                            | Main Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 52  | MacCann, Jiang, Brown, Double, Bucich, & Minbashian (2020) | International  | 158 studies, >42,000 participants | Emotional intelligence was positively associated with academic performance, psychological adjustment, stress management, and adaptive coping. Students with higher EI demonstrated better emotional regulation and adaptation across diverse educational and cultural contexts. |

**Table 2. Full Search String Strategy by Database**

| Database | Search Date     | Search String                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Language Limit | Year Range      | Filters Applied                 |
|----------|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| Scopus   | 15 January 2026 | TITLE-ABS-KEY(("emotional intelligence" OR "emotional competence" OR "emotional skills") AND ("intercultural adaptation" OR "cross-cultural adaptation" OR "cultural adjustment" OR "intercultural adjustment" OR "psychological adaptation" OR "sociocultural adaptation") AND ("higher education" OR | English        | 2020–March 2026 | Article, Journal, Peer-reviewed |

| Database                              | Search Date      | Search String                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Language Limit | Year Range       | Filters Applied                                          |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Web of Science Core Collection</b> | 20 January 2026  | "university students" OR "college students" OR "international students")<br>TS=((("emotional intelligence" OR "emotional competence" OR "emotional skills") AND ("intercultural adaptation" OR "cross-cultural adaptation" OR "cultural adjustment" OR "psychological adaptation" OR "sociocultural adaptation") AND ("higher education" OR "university students" OR "college students" OR "international students")) | English        | 2020– March 2026 | Article, SSCI, ESCI, Peer-reviewed                       |
| <b>ScienceDirect</b>                  | 5 February 2026  | ("emotional intelligence" OR "emotional competence") AND ("intercultural adaptation" OR "cross-cultural adaptation" OR "cultural adjustment") AND ("university students" OR "international students" OR "higher education")                                                                                                                                                                                           | English        | 2020– March 2026 | Research Articles, Open Access and Subscription Journals |
| <b>SpringerLink</b>                   | 12 February 2026 | ("emotional intelligence" OR "emotional competence") AND ("intercultural adaptation" OR "cross-cultural adaptation" OR "psychological adaptation" OR "sociocultural adaptation") AND ("higher education" OR "university students" OR "international students")                                                                                                                                                        | English        | 2020– March 2026 | Article, Education, Psychology                           |
| <b>Taylor &amp; Francis Online</b>    | 25 February 2026 | ("emotional intelligence") AND ("intercultural adaptation" OR "cultural adjustment" OR "cross-cultural adaptation") AND ("university students" OR "international students")                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | English        | 2020– March 2026 | Peer-reviewed Journals, Article                          |
| <b>Wiley Online Library</b>           | 10 March 2026    | ("emotional intelligence" OR "emotional competence") AND ("intercultural adaptation" OR "psychological adaptation" OR "sociocultural adaptation") AND ("higher education" OR "international students" OR "college students")                                                                                                                                                                                          | English        | 2020– March 2026 | Research Article, Education, Psychology                  |