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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND BURNOUT AMONG EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: The present study seeks to explore the relationship between Algerian EFL students' emotional intelligence (EI) and their burnout status. To determine the levels of these variables and reach the purpose of the study, two self-report scales are employed with a sample of 57 EFL third-year students at Ecole Normale Supérieure of Bouzareah (ENSB), in Algiers. The first scale is the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10), used to measure the students' EI level, while the second one is the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI-SS), used to measure their burnout level. Surprisingly, the findings reveal no significant relationship between the EI level of EFL students and their burnout level since the Pearson's Correlation demonstrates that r= .024, which suggests that EI is not a factor that affects burnout. The results also show that 60% of the students have a high level of EI, and 40% have a high level of burnout.

Keywords: Burnout, Emotional Intelligence (EI), EFL students, the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10), the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS).

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INTRODUCTION

Burnout has been spreading at an alarming rate in Algerian universities. A 2018 study conducted by Mihailescu et al. revealed that more than 29.7% of Algerian students suffer from this dangerous phenomenon, which is a state of emotional exhaustion caused by long-term excessive pressure and stress. Burnout affects many individuals from different specialities and occupations regardless of their Intelligence Quotient (IQ) profiles. Some individuals with high IQ profiles struggle with burnout, whereas others with lower IQ profiles can handle stress efficiently. Since the IQ of individuals does not seem to affect their burnout tendencies, what is the factor that can make a difference? A possible answer would be that their capacity to control and regulate their emotions may play a role and make a difference in dealing with this phenomenon. For that reason, emotional intelligence (EI), the ability of individuals to understand and manage their own and other people's emotions, might be a factor that can help prevent or reduce burnout.

The reason to suspect EI to be a factor that helps prevent burnout is that its benefits can be noticed in everyday decision-making processes and interpersonal communication (Mayer et al., 2008); in addition, it helps emotional regulation and prevents serious illnesses (Fernandez-Berrocal et al., 2006). In the academic context, specifically in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, emotional intelligence seems to promote higher achievement, enable students to recognise their strengths and weaknesses, as well as help them participate in speaking sessions with reduced anxiety (Bora, 2012).

In another regard, burnout can manifest itself in students as feelings of exhaustion, strain, and fatigue because of the overwhelming amounts of schoolwork, students' loss of interest in their studies, and their inability to see the meaning and the relevance of their education (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009). Burnout has been proven to have dangerous effects on students, such as exhaustion, feelings of incompetence, and a pessimistic detached attitude toward schoolwork (Zhang et al., 2007). Thus, it has some detrimental effects on students' overall well-being and academic performance.

Hence, the present study attempts to discover the correlation between student burnout and emotional intelligence and add significant data to the literature on these variables.

Review of Literature

Burnout

Burnout has been one of the major fields of scientific research in education over the last forty years. Freudenberger (1975), who was the first researcher to introduce the term "burnout", defined it as *"failure or exhaustion because of excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources"* (1975, p. 73). Years later, Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter described it as *"a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy"* (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 397). In other words, burnout is a longitudinal process that happens due to internal and external stressors, and is experienced on three facades: emotional exhaustion, alienation, and reduced self-worth. Early studies on burnout were restricted to professional and occupational burnout, such as burnout among teachers, nurses, and doctors. However, more recent ones expanded to encompass burnout among students since it has been proven that they, too, are susceptible to this phenomenon and its dangerous effects just like professionals or even worse (Kafry & Pines, 1980).

Student burnout can be caused and triggered by many factors. The most prevalent ones include heavy academic workloads, high expectations from

significant others, a hostile school climate, and maladaptive coping (Salanova et al., 2010; Slivar, 2000; Salmela-Aro et al., 2008; Vizoso et al., 2019). Over time, these factors can put the students under an overwhelming amount of stress and pressure that eventually leads them to suffer from burnout and its detrimental effects. On that note, the effects and consequences of this phenomenon on students' studies and overall well-being are alarming. For instance, when it comes to studies, burnout has been proven to hurt students' school performance and academic achievement since it causes a lack of motivation and productivity (Yang, 2004) and leads to less student engagement (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009). Furthermore, burnout has harmful effects on students' mental and physical health since it increases the risk of them suffering from anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms (Walburg, 2014). As a final point, what makes student burnout a severe issue is that its effects not only last throughout students' educational journey but may also prevail and evolve to become professional burnout (Yang & Farn, 2005).

Emotional Intelligence

In the past thirty years, emotional intelligence (EI) has attracted the attention of both researchers and the public; it has become one of the most famous and widely studied areas in research due to its importance and countless benefits. Salovey and Mayer (1990), among the pioneer researchers of EI, defined it in their first article "Emotional Intelligence" as: *"the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions"* (1990, p. 189). In other words, EI includes the individual's ability to detect, examine and decipher his own and other people's feelings and emotions, and to use that information as a guide to improving his thinking and behaviour.

Many theories and models tried to explain EI. However, the two main ones are the ability-based model proposed by Mayer and Salovey and the mixed models, which comprise the Bar-on model and the Goleman model. First, the ability-based model is considered one of the most reliable models of EI because it is supported by empirical data and has a solid theoretical base (Mayer et al., 2011). The theory of this model regards EI as an ability to reason with emotions and to use them to solve problems and facilitate cognitive processes (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Thus, it focuses on emotions themselves and their relationship with cognition. On the other hand, in their description of EI, the mixed-models mix mental abilities and other "*non-ability traits*" such as personality characteristics (Mayer et al., 2000).

EI benefits the well-being and performance of people in general and students in particular. For instance, it has been positively related to such aspects as relationship satisfaction (Gottman et al., 2001), higher job performance (Ngari, 2014; Chan, 2006), and more academic achievement (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Maguire et al., 2017; Zarezadeh, 2013; Rovnak, 2007). Moreover, when it comes to EFL students, it has been proven by many studies that EI can be very beneficial and advantageous for foreign language learning. For example, a study by Bora (2012) revealed that students with higher EI scores were more eager to attend and participate in speaking classes (Bora, 2012). Furthermore, emotionally intelligent students can recognise and communicate their emotions, needs, weaknesses, and strengths; they can self-actualize to set and carry out goals in the EFL classroom (Roohani & Esmailvandi, 2016).

Previous studies

Over the past few decades, and especially with the growing body of research revealing the benefits of EI, on the one hand, and the dangerous and alarming effects of burnout, on the other, many researchers have connected the dots and attempted to find a solution for burnout by investigating its relationship with EI. However, most of these studies were conducted on occupational and job burnout, such as burnout in teachers and health professionals.

In regards to teachers, many studies have attempted to study the relationship between EI and teacher burnout due to the latter's hazardous effects on teachers' well-being and career (Vaezi & Fallah, 2011). Some of these studies found no significant relationship between the two variables. For instance, Thornqvist (2011) conducted a study on the relationship between burnout and EI among elementary school teachers in rural Florida by using the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey (MBIES). The results revealed no significant relationship between them. Similarly, De Vito (2009) investigated the relationship between burnout and EI among 64 secondary high school teachers and found no significant relationship between the two variables.

On the other hand, most other studies on this topic found opposite results to those of Thornqvist (2011) and De Vito (2009). For instance, Deng et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between burnout and EI among 146 special school teachers using the MBI-GS and Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS). They found that EI is negatively correlated with teacher burnout. That is to say, the higher the teacher's level of EI is, the less likely they are to show burnout-related symptoms. Similarly, Alavinia and Ahmadzadeh (2012) explored the association between burnout and EI in a sample of 75 high school EFL teachers in West Azerbaijan using the MBIES and Bar-On's EQ-i. The results also revealed that EI is negatively associated with burnout and, thus, is a potential predictor of teacher burnout.

Moreover, just like the two previously mentioned studies, a significant body of research comprised of studies done all around the world on various types of teachers (Fiorilli et al., 2019; Esmaili et al., 2018; Vaezi & Fallah, 2011) have found a negative relationship between burnout and EI. Thus, it can be suggested that EI might be a factor that can predict teacher burnout and can potentially prevent it if it is improved through practice.

As previously mentioned, the relationship between EI and burnout is a topic that was initially researched and studied only in relation to occupational and job burnout. However, years later, researchers broadened their scope of research to include students. At first, nursing students got the most attention since their burnout symptoms were the most apparent and severe, then students from other fields such as EFL were included.

In the EFL context, it is commonly believed that most language learners are prone to burnout due to the constant stress and pressure they endure (Ehrman, 1996, as cited in Ma et al., 2018). Therefore, many studies have attempted to find a solution to help them prevent and cope with this phenomenon by studying its relationship with other variables such as EI. For example, Abdolrezapour and Tavakoli (2012) attempted to raise students' EI through emotionally vigorous activities. A writing test and a Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQ) were administered to an experimental group. The results showed that learners from this group scored significantly higher in both the writing test and the TEIQ than their counterparts from the control group. Thus, it was concluded that a positive relationship exists between students' EI and school performance. In harmony

with the previous study's results, other studies replicated the same experiment in different contexts and showed similar results (Abdolrezapour, 2013; Shao et al., 2013).

Furthermore, EI has been proven to be an essential factor in EFL classes since much interpersonal interaction is required (Bouhafs, 2017). For instance, in a study by Zarezadeh (2013) about the effects of EI in EFL classrooms, it was confirmed that a positive relationship exists between EFL students' EI levels and learning.

Despite all of the previously mentioned studies and others (Roohani et al., 2018; Roohani & Esmailvandi, 2016), which emphasise the central role that EI plays in combatting EFL students' burnout, there is still little research conducted on this topic.

Problem Statement

Despite the severeness of the phenomenon of burnout, and despite EI being a possible factor of help in reducing its repercussions, there is a scarcity of research surrounding the correlation between EI and burnout, especially among EFL students in the Algerian university context. This paucity of research on the relationship between these two variables among EFL students is a gap in the literature that needs to be filled and given more attention. Therefore, this study has the following objectives:

(1) To fill in the existing knowledge gap in the literature by addressing the abovementioned problem in the Algerian EFL context.

(2) To determine the burnout levels of third-year EFL students at Ecole Normale Superieure of Bouzareah (ENSB).

(3) To determine the Emotional Quotients of ENSB third-year EFL students.

(4) To analyse the nature of the relationship between student burnout and emotional intelligence in the context of the study.

Students of English as a Foreign Language at ENSB face overwhelming anxiety and stress due to the difficulty of their speciality and the pressure that becoming teachers in four or five years puts on them. Thus, these students may be susceptible to burnout because of the stress they experience. Therefore, we believe that the following three questions need to be addressed in order to achieve the previous objectives:

(1) What is the burnout level of third-year students of English at ENSB?

(2) What is the emotional intelligence level of third-year students of English at ENSB?

(3) Is there a relationship between the emotional intelligence of ENSB third-year EFL students and their burnout levels?

Hypotheses

(1) Third-year students of English at ENSB have low burnout levels.

(2) Third-year students of English at ENSB have high EI levels.

(3) There is a negative relationship between burnout and emotional intelligence levels among ENSB third-year EFL students.

METHODS

This study utilises a quantitative approach and a correlational design to investigate the relationship between the emotional intelligence and burnout levels of EFL students in the study's context. To conduct the study, respondents were asked to respond to two self-report scales at one point in time, making it a non-experimental cross-sectional study.

The population of the study comprises students of all levels in the Department of English at ENSB. This population was addressed because it is suspected to be highly prone to burnout and at risk of suffering from its effects.

The questionnaire was sent to a sample of 240 third-year students of English at ENSB, but only 57 students responded. To avoid bias and to protect

the respondents' identities, personal data were not collected.

The researchers tried to assure that the sample had the same distribution of characteristics as the targeted population by using a quota technique where the sample description was: EFL students at ENSB.

Data Collection

To collect data for the study, an electronic self-report questionnaire on Google Forms comprising of two scales was sent to the sample through their teacher. The questionnaire was administered online in order to be able to reach the students and overcome their unavailability at college due to the restrictions that were imposed because of Covid-19. The questionnaire was open for submission for twenty days, during which the total number of participants reached 57 third-year EFL students.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool used in this study was an anonymous self-report questionnaire composed of two scales, which are the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10), used to measure the EI level of the students, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS), used to measure their burnout status. Both scales are very widely used and were proven reliable by many studies. Thus, no piloting was conducted for either of them.

The BEIS-10

The Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10) was used in this study to measure the EI level of the students. It is an adapted version of the Schutte Emotional Intelligence 33-item student Scale (SEIS). It contains ten items categorised into five factors: appraisal of own emotions, appraisal of others' emotions, regulation of own emotions, regulation of others' emotions, and utilisation of emotions. This scale uses a Likert scale, which means that the respondents had to choose from: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neutral; (4) Agree; and (5) Strongly Agree.

The BEIS-10 was chosen for this study because it allows for a faster collection of data while still maintaining the psychometric properties of the original scale (Davies et al., 2010). Moreover, it was proven to be a valid and reliable measurement tool with a .84 reliability coefficient (Rizzo, 2013).

The MBI-SS

In this study, the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI-SS) was used to measure the burnout level of the students. It is a 15-item self-report scale that includes three subscales: exhaustion, cynicism, and academic efficacy. All items were scored on a 7-point frequency rating scale, ranging from (0) Never to (6) Always.

This scale is widely used and has been proven reliable by numerous studies from many countries such as Brazil, China, and Turkey (Campos & Maroco, 2012; Hu & Schaufeli, 2009; Yavuz & Dogan, 2014).

To make the MBI-SS more suitable for the present study, it was adapted and shortened into a 10-items scale by removing five items from the original 15. The five excluded items are those with numbers 2, 7, 8, 11, and 12. The criteria for excluding them consisted of analysing whether the idea they expressed and the information they attempted to elicit were a repetition of what other items already covered.

Moreover, another slight change was made to the scale in this study, which consisted of adding examples to unclear or difficult-to-understand items to render them more comprehensible and ensure the accuracy of the participants' answers.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions and test their corresponding hypotheses, responses were retrieved from Google Forms and converted into Excel spreadsheets to be coded in a codebook according to the original scales. The EI scale responses were coded into five points varying from "5= Strongly Agree" to "1= Strongly Disagree", while the burnout scale was coded into seven points from "7= Everyday" until "1= Never". The coded data sets were inserted into SPSS to generate the necessary descriptive analysis tables and to find the correlation coefficient of the two variables.

Ethical Issues

Ethical principles were followed and taken into consideration in this study. For example, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' identities were protected. Moreover, objectivity and reliability were considered, and the researchers prevented any inaccuracy or research misconduct.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results Retrieved from MBI-SS

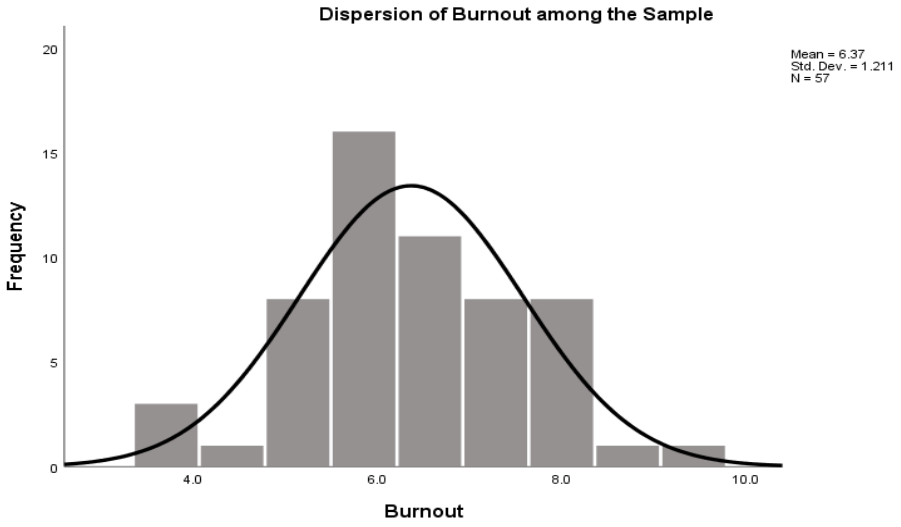
After tabulating the data, the researchers calculated the burnout level of each student using the additive method to generate 57 burnout scores. Following the method proposed by Caboral-Stevens et al. (2016) to calculate the norms and determine high, medium, and low levels of burnout among students required calculating the median (=6). The said method resulted in the data in **Table 1** below.

TABLE 1. Percentages of burnout levels of students

Range	Cluster	N	Per cent (%)
>6	High	23	40%
=6	Medium	1	2%
<6	Low	33	58%

With the help of SPSS, the researchers could generate the dispersion of burnout among students, as shown in **Figure 1**, which appears to be reasonably symmetrical since the skewness = 0.120.

FIGURE 1. Dispersion of burnout among the sample



Results Retrieved from BEIS-10

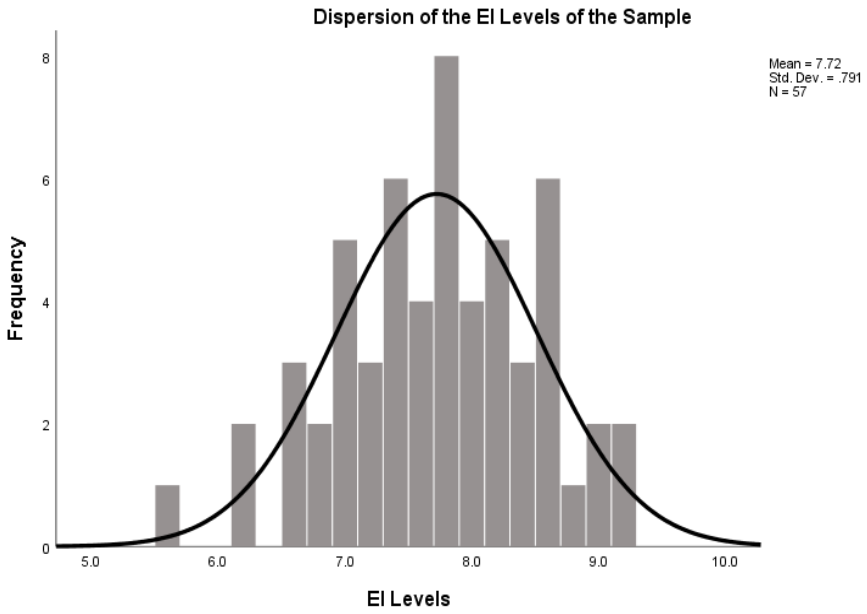
Data collected from the second scale, BEIS-10, were tabulated in Excel to generate an emotional quotient (EQ) for each of the 57 students. To calculate the norms that determine high, medium, and low EQ profiles, the median (=8) was used. This resulted in **Table 2**.

TABLE 2. Percentages of students' EI levels

Range	Cluster	N	Per cent (%)
>8	High	19	33%
=8	Medium	4	7%
<8	Low	34	60%

Upon inserting the data set in SPSS, descriptive statistics were generated to pave the way for correlation and regression analyses. Data analysis showed a skewness of negative 0.281, indicating a fairly symmetrical dispersion of EI levels among the sample, as shown in **Figure 2**.

FIGURE 2. Dispersion of EI levels of the sample



The Correlation between EI and Burnout

A T-test was conducted to compare the means and standard deviations of the dependent variable, burnout, and the independent variable, EI. The test resulted in the report in **Table 3**.

TABLE 3. T-test of EI levels and burnout

EI Level		Burnout	
Mean	7.72	Mean	6.37
Standard Error	0.10	Standard Error	0.16
Median	7.80	Median	6.29
Mode	7.80	Mode	5.29
Standard Deviation	0.79	Standard Deviation	1.21
Sample Variance	0.63	Sample Variance	1.47
Kurtosis	-0.14	Kurtosis	-0.02
Skewness	-0.28	Skewness	0.12
Range	3.60	Range	5.71
Minimum	5.60	Minimum	3.71
Maximum	9.20	Maximum	9.43
Sum	440.20	Sum	363.00
Count	57.00	Count	57.00
Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.21	Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.32

After that, using Pearson's Correlation, the researchers found r=.024, as shown in **Table 4**.

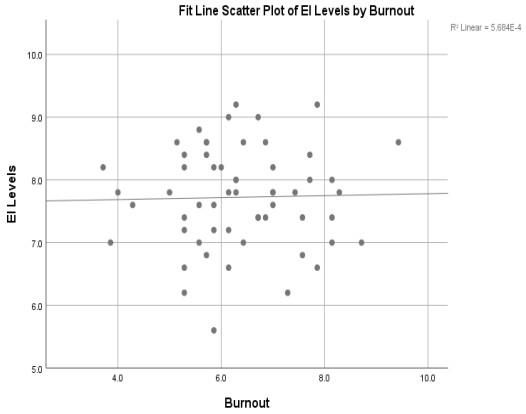
TABLE 4. Pearson's Correlation between burnout and EI levels

Correlations

		EI Level	Burnout
EI Level	Pearson Correlation	1	.024
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.860
	N	57	57
Burnout	Pearson Correlation	.024	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.860	
	N	57	57

From there, the researchers generated a scatter plot of EI levels by burnout in **Figure 3**.

FIGURE 3. Scatter plot of EI levels by burnout



Finally, to delve deeper into exploring the relationship between the variables, a regression analysis was conducted, resulting in **Tables 5** and **6** below.

TABLE 5. Regression analysis between burnout and EI level (ANOVA)

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.047	1	.047	.031	.860[b]
	Residual	82.033	55	1.492		
	Total	82.079	56			

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

b. Predictors: (Constant), EI Levels

TABLE 6. Linear regression of burnout and EI levels

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	6.087	1.602		3.799	.000
	EI Levels	.036	.206	.024	.177	.860

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

Discussion

Discussion about Hypothesis (1)

The results of this study reveal that 58% of ENSB EFL students have a low level of burnout, while 40% have a high level, and only 2% have a medium level. This suggests that most third-year EFL students at ENSB possess a low level of burnout. Thus, hypothesis (1) is confirmed.

These findings are a bit reassuring since they indicate that most students have low levels of burnout and are not severely affected by it. However, the fact that 40% of the students suffer from high levels of this syndrome is worrying and cannot be disregarded since this phenomenon can have some detrimental effects on their mental health and academic performance.

Discussion about Hypothesis (2)

The statistical analysis shows that 60% of the participants scored high on EI, which indicates that the majority of third-year EFL students at ENSB have a high level of EI. Therefore, hypothesis (2) is confirmed.

These results are promising for the students because individuals who have high EI levels have been reported to be able to successfully cope with their daily demands, challenges, and pressures, thus, have higher chances of succeeding in their studies and lives in general (Bar-On, 1997; Taylor, 2001)

Discussion about Hypothesis (3)

The findings of this study revealed no significant relationship between the emotional intelligence of ENSB third-year EFL students and their burnout levels. Using Pearson's Correlation, the researchers found that r= .024, which indicates that there is no significant correlation between the two variables and that EI is not a factor that affects the students' burnout levels. Therefore, these results do not support the third hypothesis.

However, these results are compatible with some other studies, such as the ones of De Vito (2009) and Thornqvist (2011), who investigated the relationship between the burnout and EI of teachers and found no significant relationship between the two variables. It is interesting to note that the studies mentioned above were done about teachers only. Thus, this study would be among the first to be conducted on students and indicate that EI is not a factor that affects their burnout.

It is also necessary to mention that the results of this study are still inconsistent with most of the research done on this topic. Therefore, further research among Algerian EFL students is required to get a more in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of burnout is not sufficiently talked about in the Algerian context despite its detrimental effects on university students' physical and mental health and their academic achievement. Thus, the present paper attempted to fill that knowledge gap and explore solutions by investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and burnout and, in turn, determining whether EI plays a role in reducing and/or preventing burnout.

The findings of this study revealed no significant relationship between the sample's burnout and EI levels. Moreover, the analysis reported that most participants have high levels of EI and low levels of burnout. However, it also reported that 40% of the sample suffer from high levels of burnout. These results suggest that EI is not a factor that affects burnout and that the latter exists at a relatively high rate among ENSB EFL third-year students.

On that account, serious and immediate actions should be taken to find a solution to prevent and/or deal

with this phenomenon by policymakers, teachers, and students. For instance, students can attempt to prevent being affected by this phenomenon through reducing stressors and taking time to relax, or by enrolling in burnout programs that can guide them to improve their mental health and avoid burnout. On the other hand, teachers can have a substantial impact on the psyche of students. Therefore, fostering a positive classroom environment and giving importance to the EI of students can help reduce their risk of burnout.

In regards to future studies, we noticed that there is a lack of research on burnout in the Algerian context. Therefore, more studies on this phenomenon and its relationship with EI and other variables, such as academic engagement, are recommended for future studies. In the same lane, more in-depth studies on the causes of burnout among EFL students are recommended to find out its sources. Furthermore, the present study was conducted on a small sample; for this, it is recommended for future studies to replicate it on a larger one involving more than one university in Algeria or other countries. Lastly, it is also recommended for future studies to investigate whether student burnout develops over time to become occupational burnout.

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