



Research article

Emotional intelligence in young emerging adults: A focus on Wong and Law's scale in the digital work sphere

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing research on the usefulness and validity of the four-factor Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), empirical evidence for its relevance to Black African young emerging adults seems non-existent. The study's objective was to assess the relevance of the original WLEIS factor structure for a sample (N = 365) of South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) final year students (mean age = 24.3 years; SD = 2.38). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, and convergent and discriminant validity tests revealed a three-factor first-order structure with uniquely descriptive items characteristic of the sample's emotional intelligence. The findings contribute to the WLEIS measurement of emotional intelligence in young emerging adults who are preparing to enter the digital-age work world.

1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) remains an important concept in the realm of psychology and workforce development. The ability to understand, manage, and harness one's own emotions and those of others is crucial for personal and professional success in increasingly automated digitised workspace. As a unique human attribute, emotional intelligence differentiates individuals from machines in deindividuated technology-driven workspaces [1–3].

The attention emotion regulation has gained in the digital context [4–6] emphasizes the importance of understanding the strategies individuals use to regulate their emotions in a digital setting. Digital competence (DC) is an essential skill in the digital age [4], and it correlates significantly with emotional intelligence. Therefore, for young emerging adults to succeed in the digital realm, they must develop both their emotional intelligence and digital competence.

The digital work world space demands a heightened level of emotional intelligence, as individuals must interpret non-verbal cues through screens, empathize with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, and manage emotions while isolated from physical work environments [7,8]. In recent years, the digital realm has not only transformed the way people work and communicate but has also necessitated a re-evaluation of traditional notions of emotional intelligence [1,3]. As remote work, virtual collaborations, and digital networking become integral to professional life, the ability to interpret and navigate emotions in these contexts becomes ever more vital. In the fast-paced and ever-evolving digital workplace, young emerging adults face numerous challenges in adapting to their roles and responsibilities [9]. While they represent the workforce of the future, the level of their emotional intelligence remains a topic of

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concern. As they transition to adulthood and engage with the challenges of the digital age, their emotional intelligence plays a significant role in shaping their personal and professional trajectories [10].

The objective of this article was to explore the utility of the factor structure of the Wong and Law's Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS: 11) for the assessment of young emerging adults' emotional intelligence. Having insight into the utility of the WLEIS for measuring modern-day young emerging adults' emotional intelligence may inform educational practices for developing this important attribute to help them thrive in an automated work world.

2. Literature

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) found its roots in the early works of Thorndike [11] who initially identified a construct known as social intelligence. Over the past century, research on emotional intelligence has gained substantial momentum, leading to a deeper understanding of its multifaceted nature. EI has been recognised as a pivotal attribute that promotes numerous positive outcomes in various domains of people's lives. The coining of the term "emotional intelligence" by Salovey and Mayer [12] and its popularisation by Goleman [13] have propelled EI into the spotlight, generating widespread interest across academic, educational, organisational, and societal spheres.

In education research, the significance of EI has been well-documented, particularly in academic settings. Studies have consistently highlighted the positive impact of emotional intelligence on students' academic performance and overall well-being [14,15]. In organisational studies, EI has been linked to job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour [16]. EI has also been identified as a key factor in reducing burnout [17] and countering counterproductive work behaviour [16]. These findings underscore the far-reaching implications of emotional intelligence, both within educational contexts and in the workplace.

Van Rooy and Viswevaran [18] characterize emotional intelligence as a multifaceted construct that describes the competence to recognize, generate, understand, express, and evaluate both one's own and others' emotions. This definition highlights the importance of these abilities in guiding thinking and facilitating effective coping with environmental demands and pressures.

Researchers have explored different dimensions of emotional intelligence. Some view it as the ability to cognitively process emotional information [19], while others consider it a dispositional trait akin to personality [20]. A third perspective integrates personality-related dispositions and traits into the conceptualisation of emotional intelligence [13, 21]. This diversity in definitions and perspectives indicates the complexity of the emotional intelligence construct and its domains.

The literature reflects multiple facets of emotional intelligence, leading to the emergence of trait emotional intelligence, ability emotional intelligence, and mixed models. Trait emotional intelligence involves emotion-related self-perceptions and is distinct from personality, cognitive intelligence, and ability emotional intelligence. Ability emotional intelligence, on the other hand, is distinct from cognitive intelligence [22,23]. Mixed models combine ability, personality traits, and other non-cognitive affective components in the conceptualisation of emotional intelligence [24].

Mayer and Salovey [25] are credited with introducing the concept of ability emotional intelligence, leading to the development of the Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Scale (MSCEIT) [19]. Wong et al. [26] extended this conceptualisation by developing Wong's Emotional Intelligence Scale (WEIS) as a measurement instrument for emotional intelligence.

Wong et al. [26] proposed a well-researched model of ability emotional intelligence, comprising four main areas. These areas include:

- Self-emotion appraisal: The ability to understand one's deep emotions and express them naturally.
- Others' emotion appraisal: The ability to perceive and understand the emotions of other people.
- Regulation of emotion in self: The ability to regulate one's emotions and recover from emotionally stressful experiences.
- Use of emotion: The ability to channel emotions toward constructive activities and enhance performance.

Mayer and Salovey [25] argue that ability emotional intelligence shares common ground with traditional intelligence in various ways. They [27] propose that test items for ability emotional intelligence can be standardised to have correct answers through consensus scoring, indicating that certain responses to emotional situations can be objectively defined. This perspective suggests that ability emotional intelligence can be measured through standardised objective tests with expert scoring.

The WLEIS offers a concise, reliable, and validated measurement tool for emotional intelligence [28]. Its brevity is well-suited for young emerging adults who often have limited time for lengthy assessments. This scale, structured into four factors, allows educational and organisational practitioners to identify specific areas where individuals may require support or development, making it an effective tool for personalised training and coaching in the fast-paced digital workplace [28].

3. Problem statement

The problem at hand is assessing the relevance of the WLEIS factor structure for measuring the emotional intelligence of modern-day emerging adults. The 16-item WLEIS has been widely researched across various (and especially adult) populations and settings with empirical evidence of the sound reliability and validity of its four-factor structure [28–30]. However, some research points to contradictory views on the WLEIS factor structure and calls for more research on the psychometric properties of the WLEIS, especially in under-researched settings such as young emerging adults in modern digital-age relevant educational contexts [29,31–33].

The lack of research on a reliable and valid assessment tool that accurately measures the emotional intelligence of young emerging adults, considering their unique developmental stage, hampers the ability to understand, support, and enhance the emotional

intelligence of young emerging adults as they navigate the complexities of the modern work environment. A lack of insight into their emotional intelligence may potentially hinder their personal and professional growth within the digital realm [4,5,34].

It is evident from the literature that emotional intelligence of young emerging adults is a critical factor in their personal and professional development, particularly in the context of the evolving digital workplace [4,16,35]. By recognizing the significance of emotional intelligence and employing appropriate measurement tools, practitioners can empower young emerging adults to excel in their careers and contribute positively to society. As the digital landscape continually evolves, the ability to comprehend and manage emotions in a digital context is essential for personal and professional growth [10].

4. Method

4.1. Participants

A total of (N = 365) Black African young emerging adults (mean age = 24.3 years; SD = 2.38; males = 23%; females = 77%) in their final year of study at the South African Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) College for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) participated in the research. TVET colleges train young people (after Grade 9 or after finishing school with a Grade 12) to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are needed in the labour market. The vocational and occupational education and training programmes facilitate employability by preparing students to become functional workers in a skilled trade [32]. The students were predominantly enrolled for programmes in the fields of Civil and Mechanical Engineering (41%), Education and Development (32%), and Tourism and Administration (27%).

4.2. Materials

The participants completed the self-report, 16-item, English version of the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS: [36]). The WLEIS measured individuals' emotional intelligence in terms of (1) self-emotions appraisal (4 items; e.g. "I really understand what I feel"), (2) others-emotion appraisal (4 items; e.g. "I am a good observer of others' emotions"), (3) use of emotion (4 items; e.g. "I am a self-motivating person"), and (4) regulation of emotion (4 items; e.g. "I am able to control my temper so that I can handle difficulties rationally) on a 7-point likert-type response scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Law et al. [37] report internal consistency reliability coefficients for all four subscales of > 0.80 including construct and criterion validity for a sample of undergraduate students in Hong Kong.

4.3. Procedure and ethical considerations

All final year students were invited to attend supervised group sessions for the manual completion of the WLEIS. Only 365 completed the questionnaire. The data were captured on an Excell spreadsheet. The KZN College granted permission and the research institution's research ethics committee provided ethical clearance (2020_CEMS/IOP_041) for the research. The students provided informed consent for participating voluntarily and anonymously for research purposes.

4.4. Data analysis

The objective of the study was to explore the relevance of the WLEIS factor structure for the TVET group of young emerging adults. As such, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), using SPSS version 27 [38], was performed to assess the WLEIS factor structure for the participant sample. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using the SPSS Amos version 28 [39] software program with the robust maximum likelihood estimator, was then performed to assess for convergent and discriminant validity of the EFA-based factor structure. We applied Kline's [40] guidelines for assessing goodness of CFA model fit: Chi-square/degrees of freedom (df) or CMIN/df ≤ 3 ; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.08 ; Standardised Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR) ≤ 0.05 ; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) ≥ 0.90 ; Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) ≥ 0.90 ; and Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) with the lower AIC value indicating better model fit.

Applying the Fornell-Larcker criterion [41], we tested convergent validity by calculating the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR). AVE values of ≥ 0.50 and CR coefficients ≥ 0.70 indicated acceptable convergent validity. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio values smaller than 1.0 indicated acceptable discriminant validity among the factors. Cronbach alpha coefficients were inspected to assess for internal consistency reliability (≥ 0.70) of the best fitting CFA measurement model [41]. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and bi-variate correlations were also calculated to evaluate the magnitude and direction of associations among the factors.

5. Results

First, a random sample of (n = 100) was extracted from the total sample of (N = 365) for an initial exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the original 16 items of the WLEIS. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.63 (mediocre) but acceptable for exploratory research purposes [42]. The Bartlett Sphericity test was significant (Approximate chi-square = 552.85; df = 120; $p = 0.000$). The Monte Carlo principal component analysis (PCA) for parallel analysis (Computer Software Version 3.0, [43]) was applied to accurately determine the number of factors to retain. Factors corresponding to actual eigenvalues that are greater than the

parallel average random eigenvalues were retained [44]. The SOLO power analysis (BMDP statistical software, 1993) indicated that for the sample of (n = 100), factor loadings of ≥ 0.55 would be significant to retain, thus resulting in only three factors (cumulative variance explained = 49.12%) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that two of the WLEIS original factors (AOE and UOE) were retained. The third factor included two items from the WLEIS SEA subdimension and one item from the ROE subdimension. The third factor was relabelled as self-regulated emotion appraisal (SRE).

The three EFA factors were subjected to a reflective confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which included the data from participants (n = 265) not included in the EFA sample. Four CFA models were conducted: (1) a single factor CFA with all items loading onto an overall factor; (2) a three-factor baseline CFA with the items loading onto the respective EFA factors; (3) an adjusted first-order CFA which excluded item 4 from the SRE factor; and (4) a second-order CFA based on the adjusted CFA, with the three factors loading onto an overall emotional intelligence (EI) construct (see Fig. 1).

In Table 2, the single factor CFA did not have a good fit with the data: CMIN/df = 15.24; p = 0.000; RMSEA = 0.23; SRMR = 0.19; CFI = 0.27; TLI = 0.09; AIC = 714.60; BIC = 793.30. The baseline (EFA-based) three-factor CFA measurement model showed a better fit than the single factor EFA, but did not have a good fit with the data: CMIN/df = 5.64; p = 0.000; RMSEA = 0.13; SRMR = 0.09; CFI = 0.78; TLI = 0.70; AIC = 281.40.

Table 2 shows that the adjusted (first-order) CFA measurement model had a good fit with the data: CMIN/df = 2.18; p = 0.01; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.05; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.92; AIC = 58.50. In comparison, the adjusted CFA second-order model had a better fit with the data: CMIN/df = 1.64; p = 0.08; RMSEA = 0.05; SRMR = 0.04; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.96; AIC = 52.10.

Inspection of the path regression weights in Table 3, showed that the path loadings for the baseline CFA measurement model were all significant with path loadings >0.50 (the lower and upper confidence intervals did not contain zero in the range; p ≤ 0.001).

In Table 4, the path loadings for the adjusted (first-order) CFA measurement model were also all significant (>0.45; the lower and upper confidence intervals did not contain zero in the range; p ≤ 0.01). The adjusted first-order measurement model excluded the following items: Item 5 (AOE: I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me); item 12 (UOE: I would always encourage myself to try my best); item 9 (UOE: I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them) and item 4 (SRE: I always know whether or not I am happy).

However, Table 5 shows that some of the path loadings were not significant for the second-order adjusted CFA measurement model. The newly created factor (self-regulated emotion appraisal: SRE) did not load significantly onto the overall emotional intelligence construct. The item ([EL.3] I really understand what I feel: SEA) also did not load significantly onto the newly created factor SRE. Overall, the results showed that the adjusted CFA first-order measurement model had convergent validity and was more appropriate for the sample of participants.

Further validity analysis on the adjusted first-order CFA model (shown in Table 6) revealed that the heterotrait-monotrait ratios were smaller than 1.0 which indicated discriminant validity (the true correlation between the three factors differed: [45]). The original WLEIS factor (AOE: others-emotion appraisal) had acceptable internal consistency reliability and convergent validity with both the Cronbach alpha and composite reliability (CR) coefficients being >0.70 and the AVE = >0.50. The original WLEIS factor (UOE: use of emotion) had less acceptable (but adequate) internal consistency reliability and convergent validity with both the Cronbach alpha (=0.70) and CR (0.66) and the AVE (0.49) being close to 0.50. The newly created factor (self-regulated emotion appraisal: SRE) had adequate (although mediocre) internal consistency reliability and less acceptable convergent validity (CR = 0.55; AVE = 0.39).

Inspection of the bi-variate correlations (Table 7) showed positive and significant correlations between the two original WLEIS factors (other's emotion appraisal and use of emotion: r = 0.16; p = 0.002; small practical effect). Other's emotion appraisal also correlated significantly and positively with self-regulated emotion appraisal (r = 0.14; p = 0.01; small practical effect). Use of emotions did not correlate significantly with self-regulated emotion appraisal (r = 0.05; p = 0.34).

Table 1
Exploratory factor analysis results: Factors retained.

Factor items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Factor 1: Others-emotion appraisal [WLEIS original factor]: OEA			
[EL.7] I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others	0.74		
EL.6] I am a good observer of others' emotions	0.73		
[EL.8] I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me.	0.65		
[EL.5] I always know my friends' emotions from their behaviour.	0.62		
Factor 2: Use of emotion [WLEIS original factor]: UOE			
EL.10] I always tell myself I am a competent person		0.78	
[EL.12] I would always encourage myself to try my best		0.65	
[EL.11] I am a self-motivated person.		0.64	
[EL.9] I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them.		0.59	
Factor 3: Self-regulated emotion appraisal [Combination of WLEIS factors]: SRE			
EL.4] I always know whether or not I am happy [WLEIS self-emotion appraisal: SEA]			0.86
EL.13] I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally [WLEIS regulation of emotion: ROE]			0.74
[EL.3] I really understand what I feel [WLEIS self-emotion appraisal: SEA]			0.55

Note: N = 100.

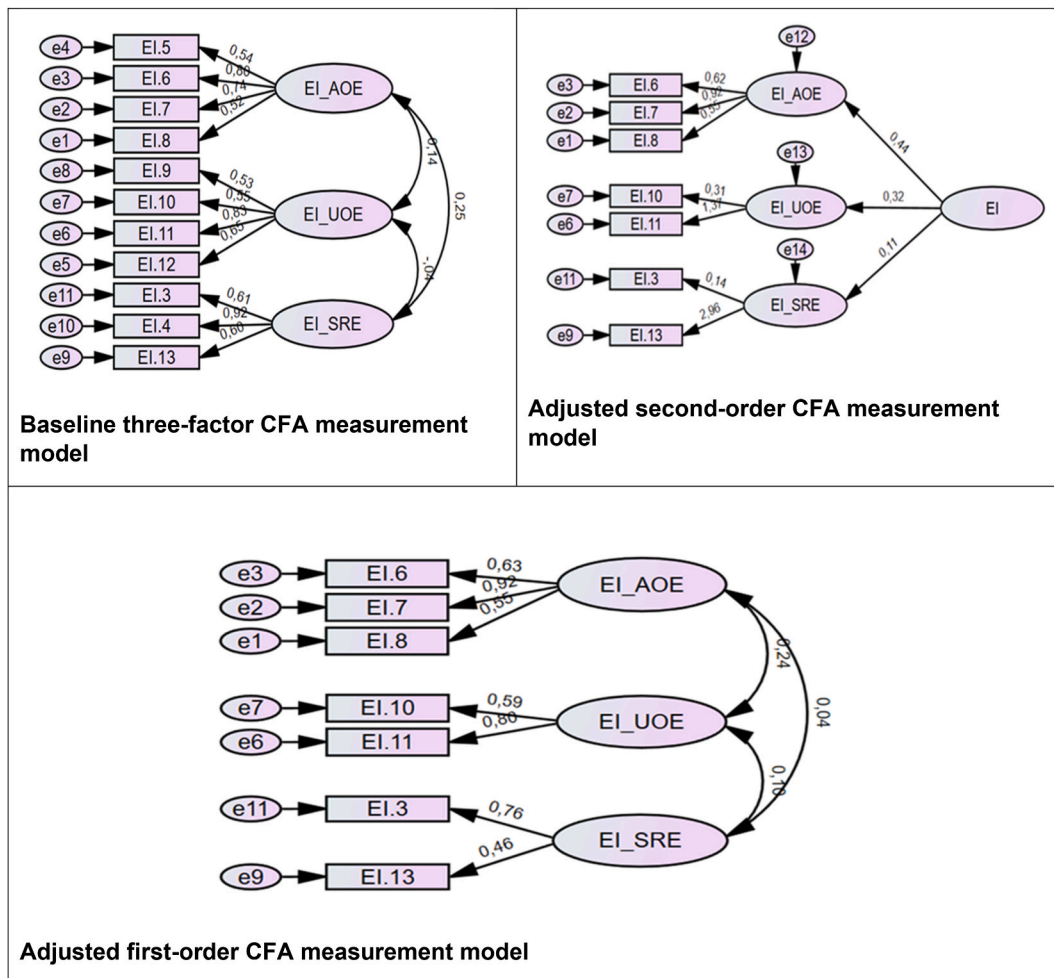


Fig. 1. Baseline three-factor CFA, adjusted single-order and adjusted second-order measurement models. Note: EI_AOE: Other's emotion appraisal. EI_UOE: Use of emotion. EI_SRE: Self-regulated emotion appraisal. EI: Emotional intelligence.

Table 2
Summary of confirmatory factor analysis models.

Model	CMIN	df	CMIN/df	p	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI	AIC
Single factor CFA	670.58	44	15.24	0.000	0.23	0.19	0.27	0.09	714.60
Three-factor CFA- baseline (includes all EFA-based items)	231.39	41	5.64	0.000	0.13	0.09	0.78	0.70	281.40
Adjusted first-order CFA (items removed)	30.45	14	2.18	0.01	0.07	0.05	0.95	0.92	58.50
Adjusted CFA- second order	18.06	11	1.64	0.08	0.05	0.04	0.98	0.96	52.10

Note: N = 265.

6. Discussion

The study assessed the relevance of the factor structure of the original WLEIS [28] for a sample of Black African young emerging adults. Contrary to Wong and Law's [28] original study which offered empirical support for a second-order factor model, the results suggested three lower-order factors (others-emotion appraisal, use of emotion and self-regulated emotion appraisal) that could not be adequately explained by a single broader dimension of emotional intelligence. The findings seem to corroborate empirical studies that question the presence of a reliable general emotional intelligence higher-order factor for the WLEIS and the variation in consistency of the four-factor factor structure across different population groups [29].

This study's results provide supportive empirical evidence for the WLEIS others-emotion appraisal and use of emotion factors as indicated by previous research [33]. In this study, others-emotion appraisal seemed to pertain to having sensitivity toward others' feelings and emotions, being a good observer of emotions, and having a good understanding of others' emotions. For this sample, the

Table 3
Standardised regression weights: Baseline CFA measurement model.

Parameter			Estimate	Lower (95% CI)	Upper (95% CI)	p
EI.8	<—	EI_AOE	0.516	0.291	0.659	0.000
EI.7	<—	EI_AOE	0.741	0.497	0.935	0.001
EI.6	<—	EI_AOE	0.799	0.56	1.014	0.001
EI.5	<—	EI_AOE	0.542	0.297	0.685	0.000
EI.12	<—	EI_UOE	0.652	0.517	0.761	0.000
EI.11	<—	EI_UOE	0.833	0.598	1.082	0.001
EI.10	<—	EI_UOE	0.553	0.294	0.758	0.000
EI.9	<—	EI_UOE	0.531	0.266	0.742	0.000
EI.13	<—	EI_SRE	0.598	0.322	0.728	0.000
EI.4	<—	EI_SRE	0.921	0.763	1.38	0.001
EI.3	<—	EI_SRE	0.613	0.351	0.724	0.000

Note: EI_AOE: Other’s emotion appraisal. EI_UOE: Use of emotion. EI_SRE: Self-regulated emotion appraisal. EI: Emotional intelligence. CI: Confidence interval.

Table 4
Standardised regression weights: Adjusted first- order CFA measurement model.

Parameter			Estimate	Lower (95% CI)	Upper (95% CI)	p
EI.8	<—	EI_AOE	0.549	0.402	0.701	0.002
EI.7	<—	EI_AOE	0.915	0.745	1.138	0.009
EI.6	<—	EI_AOE	0.628	0.419	0.774	0.003
EI.11	<—	EI_UOE	0.796	0.709	0.887	0.003
EI.10	<—	EI_UOE	0.592	0.526	0.67	0.002
EI.13	<—	EI_SRE	0.458	0.388	0.52	0.004
EI.3	<—	EI_SRE	0.758	0.641	0.858	0.007

Note: EI_AOE: Other’s emotion appraisal. EI_UOE: Use of emotion. EI_SRE: Self-regulated emotion appraisal. EI: Emotional intelligence. CI: Confidence interval.

Table 5
Standardised regression weights: Second-order adjusted CFA measurement model.

Parameter			Estimate	Lower (95% CI)	Upper (95% CI)	p
EI_AOE	<—	EI	0.442	0.166	0.777	0.002
EI_UOE	<—	EI	0.316	0.078	0.535	0.022
EI_SRE	<—	EI	0.109	...	0.146	0.692
EI.8	<—	EI_AOE	0.545	0.394	0.646	0.003
EI.7	<—	EI_AOE	0.922	0.824	1.229	0.000
EI.6	<—	EI_AOE	0.622	0.408	0.74	0.004
EI.11	<—	EI_UOE	1.369	0.9	4.055	0.000
EI.10	<—	EI_UOE	0.307	0.087	0.473	0.019
EI.13	<—	EI_SRE	2.956	0.000
EI.3	<—	EI_SRE	0.141	0.830

Note: EI_AOE: Other’s emotion appraisal. EI_UOE: Use of emotion. EI_SRE: Self-regulated emotion appraisal. EI: Emotional intelligence. CI: Confidence interval.

Table 6
Convergent and discriminant validity analysis: Adjusted first-order CFA model.

Factor	EI_AOE HTMT	EI_UOE HTMT	EI_SRE HTMT	α	CR	AVE	LLCI 95% CR	ULCI 95% CR	LLCI 95% AVE	ULCI 95% AVE
EI_AOE	—			0.72	0.75	0.51	0.53	0.95	0.30	0.86
EI_UOE	0.14	—		0.70	0.66	0.49	0.55	0.76	0.39	0.61
EI_SRE	0.12	0.08	—	0.63	0.55	0.39	0.43	0.66	0.29	0.51

Note: EI_AOE: Other’s emotion appraisal. EI_UOE: Use of emotion. EI_SRE: Self-regulated emotion appraisal. EI: Emotional intelligence. LLCI: Lower level confidence interval. ULCI: Upper level confidence interval. CR: Composite reliability. AVE: Average variance extracted. HTMT: Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of the correlations.

use of emotions seemingly relates to perceiving oneself as a self-motivated and competent person. This finding reflects the subjectivity of emotional phenomena reflected in typical emotion-related self-perceptions described by the trait models of emotional intelligence [46,47].

However, contrary to the original WLEIS four-factor structure, the original WLEIS self-emotion appraisal and regulation of emotion

Table 7
Means, Standard Deviations and Bi-variate correlations.

	Factor	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1	Other's emotion appraisal (AOE)	5.63	1.01	–		
2	Use of emotion (UOE)	6.04	0.81	0.16**	–	
3	Self-regulated emotion appraisal (SRE)	5.69	1.06	0.14**	0.05	–

Note: N = 365. *** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$.

factors combined into a separate (third) factor that reflects one ability-related item of each factor (regulation of emotion: I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally, and self-emotion appraisal: I really understand what I feel). Although the convergent validity of this factor is questionable, this finding provides interesting insight into the self-regulated emotion appraisal of the young emerging adult. For this sample, having insight into one's feelings and controlling one's temper seem important for handling difficulties rationally [29,48].

Overall, the three factors that emerged for the participants seem to explain an interrelated mix of traits and social abilities that allow for positive psychosocial developmental functioning. An inner-directed awareness and control of personal feelings to rationally handle difficulties and perceiving oneself as a self-motivated and competent person seemed to increase the self-perceived ability to read, observe and understand others' emotions. However, the findings suggest that the self-regulated appraisal of inner emotions is not necessarily associated with being motivated and competent. The supportive evidence for the participants' emotional understanding (self and others), regulation and utilisation suggests the potential to manage emotions appropriately for personal growth, general life satisfaction and performance, to form close relationships and getting social support in general [37]. The findings support the argument that people use a combination of intrapersonal traits and interpersonal abilities to function optimally in society and better adapt to the demands of their environment [29,37,48].

This study has limitations that should be considered in evaluating the implications for practice. Overall, the results obtained should be treated as preliminary because of the cross-sectional research design and relatively small sample size. Further research is needed to corroborate the factor structure of the WLEIS for Black African emerging adults on larger representative samples. The self-report, descriptive nature of the WLEIS could have influenced the factor structure that emerged for the sample. Participants were likely to reflect perceived rather than actual performance on the EI items. Future research should examine whether the study's results generalise to other populations of emerging adults. Future research can furthermore include exploring the relationship that generative artificial intelligence and task automation tools and labour productivity growth may have on emotional intelligence.

7. Practical implication

Although the WLEIS [28] is a well-established and proven reliable measure of emotional intelligence, this study's findings highlighted the importance of establishing the underlying factor structure relevant to the sample context. Interventions for developing young emerging adults' emotional intelligence for better adaptation to the tech-driven work world should consider their array of personal and social abilities for optimal psychosocial functioning. Emerging adulthood is a time of prolonged emotional insecurity with emotional stability not yet fully established. Emotional intelligence becomes especially important for emerging adults who need to embrace work world uncertainty and adaptive changes in short-term and long-term goals and aspirations [49]. This article specifically contributes to the WLEIS measurement of emotional intelligence in young emerging adults. The strength of the study lies in its methodological rigor, culturally specific focus, through model testing, adherence to established guidelines, detailing reporting of results and discussions. These factors collectively contribute to the study's credibility and its potential impact on advancing our understanding of emotional intelligence in Black African young emerging adults as the majority population group of the South African people.

8. Conclusion

Despite the limitations of the research design, the findings highlighted the importance of assessing the relevance of the WLEIS factor structure when applied to the young emerging adult context. The three-factor structure that emerged for the participants revealed an interrelated mix of traits and social abilities that allow for positive psychosocial developmental functioning. The findings contribute new insights regarding the unique patterning of Black African emerging adults' emotional intelligence that could inform educational practices for fostering their emotional intelligence in readying them for the digital work sphere.

Data availability

The data has not been deposited into a publicly available repository. Data will be made available upon request.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ingrid L. Potgieter: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Renitha Sooknannan:** Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Melinde Coetzee:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology,

Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

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.

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