Available online at www.ijournalse.org

Emerging Science Journal

(ISSN: 2610-9182)

Vol. 8, No. 6, December, 2024

Review Article

Relationship between Emotional Intelligence, Social Skills, and Anxiety: A Quantitative Systematic Review

Carlos Ramos-Galarza [1*], Brayan Rodríguez-Naranjo [1], Deyaneira Brito-Mora [1]

[1] *Facultad de Psicología, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, Av. 12 de Octubre y Roca, Quito, Ecuador.*

Abstract

Introduction: Emotional intelligence allows us to manage, regulate, and recognize our emotions and those of others, also allowing us to face and solve problems by choosing to provide an appropriate response to the situation experienced by a subject. Social skills are the behaviors that an individual emits in the interpersonal context through their feelings, rights, and opinions, seeking to resolve conflict situations immediately, minimizing the likelihood of experiencing them in the future. Anxiety appears in the individual when he perceives certain situations as threatening or dangerous, hindering his ability to provide an adequate response, being excessive, uncontrollable, or lasting, and this is classified as a mental disorder. *Objective:* The objective of this study is to describe the relationship between emotional intelligence, social skills, and anxiety. *Methods:* A quantitative methodology has been employed, basing the study on a systematic review of previous research using the Scopus, Scielo, Redalyc, and Google Scholar repositories. *Findings:* An initial sample of 1722 articles was obtained, which passed through inclusion and exclusion criteria, resulting in 73 articles. *Novelty:* The contribution of this study lies in understanding that low anxiety levels lead to better performance of emotional intelligence and social skills. This situation allows people to resolve conflicts that arise in the daily lives of individuals.

Keywords:
Anxiety;
Quality of Life;
Social Skills;
Emotional Intelligence;
Quantitative Systematic Review.

Article History:

Received:	21	April	2024
Revised:	15	November	2024
Accepted:	21	November	2024
Published:	01	December	2024

1- Introduction

For more than three decades, research teams led by Peter Salovey and John Mayer have scientifically demonstrated the usefulness of the emotional information processing model. This model facilitates the recognition, management, and regulation of one's own and other people's emotions, serving as a guide for actions and thoughts [1]. Emotional intelligence has been associated with greater physical and psychological well-being, as well as with a higher quality of life in people. That is to say, adequate emotional control favors a successful coexistence, both at a personal and social level, resulting in an optimal development in the environment [2]. The regulation of emotions generates a favorable impact on various aspects of the lives of the subjects since it allows individuals to evaluate what happens to them or the reactions they have to the demanding situations of everyday life or the circumstances that arise in the environment; therefore, it directly influences decision-making, breathing, posture control, the reduction or elimination of brain noise, the identification of emotional states, and cognitive control [3].

Our education since our childhood is a factor, possibly because of the type of teaching that was given to infants, the difference in terms of their management and control begins to be more noticeable from these ages, as it allows us to face and solve problems within which a broader and more significant context can be determined in the life of the human

* **CONTACT**: caramos@puce.edu.ec

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.28991/ESJ-2024-08-06-025

being, achieving to establish different vital paths, thus allowing us to choose the right answer according to the situation or circumstance experienced by the subject. Emotional intelligence is fundamental in the personal sphere since it addresses physiological, social, ethical, and psychological aspects. It serves as a tool for behavioral modification, promoting the development of appropriate behaviors [4, 5].

Social skills allow one to obtain an optimal personal interrelation, which promotes personal support independently of the one that could be obtained from the family environment, this influences the work and social environment allowing one to focus on one's own and others' emotions [6]. From Caballo's [7] perspective, social skills are not personality traits, but complex behaviors learned and applied in specific situations of social interaction. These behaviors reflect the feelings, desires, attitudes, rights, and opinions of an individual, presented appropriately according to the situation being experienced, and they can respect these behaviors in other people.

They are essential in the individual because they are a psychological construct that allows self-regulation of emotions, thus improving personal and social competencies, and facilitating the understanding of the importance of personal fulfillment and satisfaction to build and give meaning to the individual's life. On the other hand, the lack of social skills is evidenced by the scarcity of social experiences, norms, rules, and an inadequate interpretation and perception of social behaviors.

From the perspective of the World Health Organization [8], depression and anxiety are the most common mental disorders among the world's population, with approximately 322 million people suffering from depression and 264 million from anxiety. Finally, anxiety becomes a "*pluricausal etiological*" disorder in which several risk factors are present, in response to the influence of certain situations, there are behavioral and physiological behaviors [9]. There are two elements that relate to anxiety: trait anxiety and state anxiety. Since 1975, thanks to Spielberg's proposal [10], the distinction between trait anxiety and state anxiety has made it possible to identify how an individual can cope with anxiety situations.

Anxiety is characterized by the manifestation of symptoms such as fatigue, avoidance, insomnia, tension, distressing thoughts, and physical and behavioral changes similar to those of fear, generating responses characterized by the activation of the autonomic nervous system and motor signs associated with maladaptive behaviors [11]. It is based on the subject's perception of the negative situations that are being experienced at a given time, such situations can be presented as somatic, social, and psychological, which generate different consequences in the experiences of everyone. Consequently, the negative effects of the psychological response will affect the mental health of individuals when psychological crises occur. Therefore, these crises often lead people to the use of alcohol, drugs, or other substances to counteract the anxiety present in their lives, while manipulation becomes an aspect that favors the increase in elevated levels of anxiety.

Previous research has conducted articles in which emotional intelligence, social skills, and anxiety are associated, although there has been research covering the 3 variables, there is no common agreement between them. Studies have been reported that propose the connection between pure emotional intelligence or social skills, psychological well-being, spirituality or emotional intelligence in anxiety, burnout and academic stress [12-16]. Previous research has not described the relationship between the three variables: emotional intelligence, social skills, and anxiety. For this reason, in this study, we propose a review of the research that has been done previously in order to identify the interaction between the variables of interest. The gap that exists in this line of research has to do with the need to understand how emotional intelligence can contribute so that a person can better regulate his or her anxiety and thus be able to have social skills to face daily situations.

The central element of the present research will be to detect the impact of anxiety in people; considering that the necessary importance is not given to this topic, since this diminishes the effect that social skills and emotional intelligence bring to the individual. So, we ask ourselves, in society, how does the presence of anxiety affect emotional intelligence with social skills according to previous research?

The research will focus on analyzing the relationship between emotional intelligence and social skills and anxiety, performing a quantitative systematic review, and conducting a synthesis of the influence of the variables. Initially, reference will be made to the negative effects of anxiety on the influence of emotional intelligence on social skills. It was possible to relate the study of anxiety as an approach to emotional intelligence with social skills, since it is important because sometimes there is a lack of coping skills, adding to this that the different methods of upbringing and interpersonal relationships are important factors that significantly influence the individual and should be kept in mind. Emotional intelligence with social skills can help to reduce anxiety in the subjects, which will improve our attitudes towards difficulties and problems, thus increasing our well-being and quality of life [17].

The reader will then find the following structure in this article. First, the research methodology is presented, indicating the process followed in the quantitative systematic review. Subsequently, the results present quantitative values on sample size, age of participants, gender, countries in which the research was conducted, types of population, tests applied, and benefits of the research analyzed. Finally, the discussion explains the reasons and arguments that describe the results of the research.

2- Methodology

The approach of this research is quantitative in nature since it uses the collection of information; in this way, the inquiry obtained will be tested, this will be possible through the use of statistical strategies that will be based on proposing patterns of behavior in the numerical measurement and in the various theoretical foundations, through a process of systematic review [18]. To achieve this objective, the following databases were used: Scopus, Scielo, Redalyc, and Google Scholar.

Research was conducted using several archives of scientific journals organized according to authors, methodology, and keywords. The review was based on research published in the field of health; therefore, articles were filtered using the following inclusion criteria: original publications between 2016 and 2023, and articles discussing the relationship between emotional intelligence, social skills, and anxiety. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria were articles not indexed to the considered repositories, master's, or undergraduate theses, vague or unspecific methodology, books, or chapters that only work theory. It was decided to make language a non-limiting requirement, and English and Spanish were used for the most part. The keywords used in the search were: "*Emotional Intelligence*", "*Social Skills*", "*Anxiety*", "Emotions".

The research began with the data collection phase, initially by performing the corresponding searches, a total of 1722 articles were obtained in the first identification stage. For this, an initial review process was conducted in which the articles that were already available in advance were identified, setting aside duplicate files (N = 526). Consequently, the third stage of eligibility consisted of an in-depth review; therefore, the articles were analyzed according to their compliance with the inclusion criterion by presenting the words necessary for the summary or abstract; 423 that did not meet this criterion were eliminated at this stage. To culminate the data collection process, it was necessary to finish classifying the articles according to the exclusion criteria, so 700 files were excluded. This left a total of 73 articles, thus completing the review process at the end of the fourth selection phase and proceeding to data analysis.

The inclusion criteria for the research analyzed were: (a) it had to be research conducted in the period from 2016 to 2023, (b) to conduct a quantitative study that analyzed the relationship between emotional intelligence, social skills, and anxiety, (c) to have free access to the research, (d) to have applied the study in a sample of human beings, and (e) to have applied psychological tests that assessed the variables of interest in this research. Exclusion criteria were: (a) articles that were not open access and paid articles, (b) systematic review research or authors' reflections, and (c) outside the time frame of interest.

The quantitative method used in this research was based on a descriptive process in which statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages, measures of central tendency, mean and standard deviation were applied. The statistical values analyzed were represented graphically using pie charts, bar charts, and histograms.

For the extraction and analysis of the information from the articles included in this research, the following aspects were analyzed: DOI, country and continent of origin, article title, number, age, and population of participants. At the methodological level, the results were categorized, addressing the tests used, the benefits, and the findings of each study. A specific space was assigned in the table to highlight the limitations of each article. In addition, the variables used in the research were identified, as well as those that presented similarities with our systematic review. Figure 1 describes the research process.

3- Results

3-1- Sample Sizes of the Studies

In the 73 studies analyzed, it was observed that 41% had sample sizes in the range of 101 to 300 participants, followed by 30% in the range of 0 to 100 participants [19-84]. A minimum range of 17 participants and a maximum of 3512 was identified. The mean obtained is M = 341.03, with a standard deviation of SD = 515.4. Figure 2 shows the frequency intervals of the sample values.

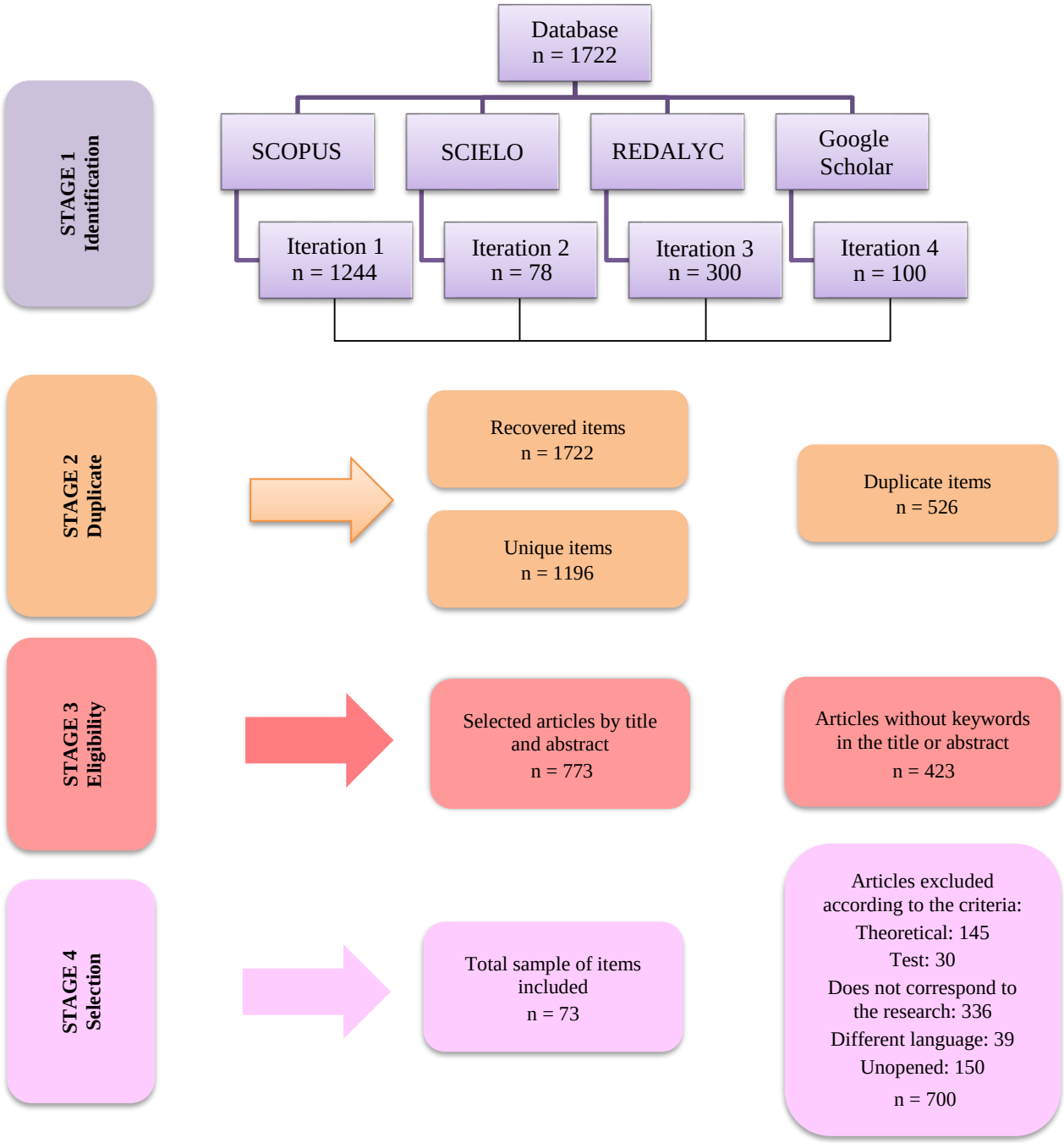

Figure 1. Flowchart of the study selection process

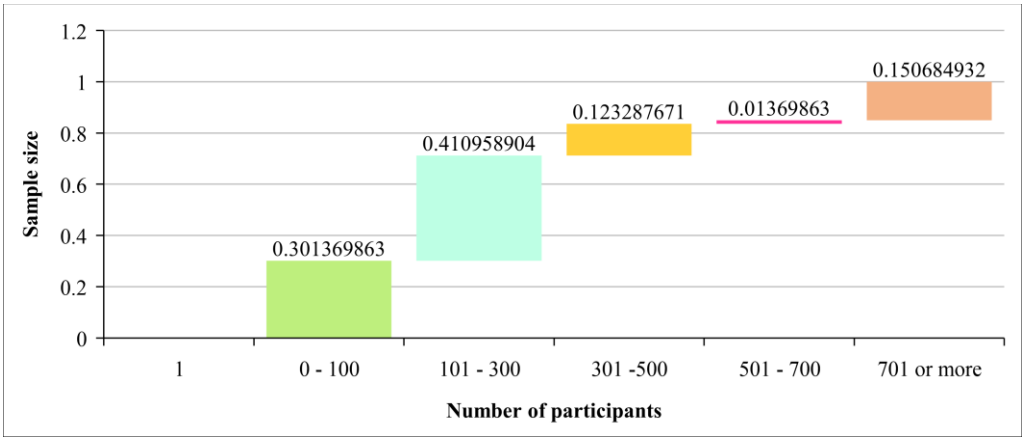

Figure 2. Sample sizes

3-2- Age of Participants

Participants in the various investigations ranged in age from as young as 8 years old to as old as 70 years old. A total of 46 participants were counted in the 16-30 age group, followed by 13 participants in the 31-50 age range. The mean age of the participants was *M* = 26.5 years, with a standard deviation of *SD* = 12.54 years. These values are visually represented in Figure 3.

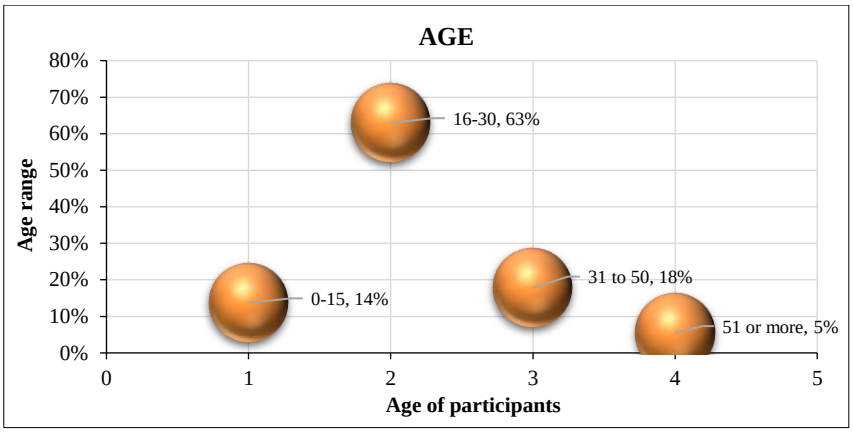

Figure 3. Age of participants

3-3- Gender of Participants

In the analysis of the research, two genders were identified among the participants, with the male gender predominating, with a minimum of 2 males and a maximum of 1816 participants. Forty-five percent of the participants were in the 0 to 50 range, followed by the 101 to 500 range, which accounted for a total of 23%. The mean number of participants was *M* = 171.36, with a standard deviation of *SD* = 291.69. Figure 4 visually presents this detailed information.

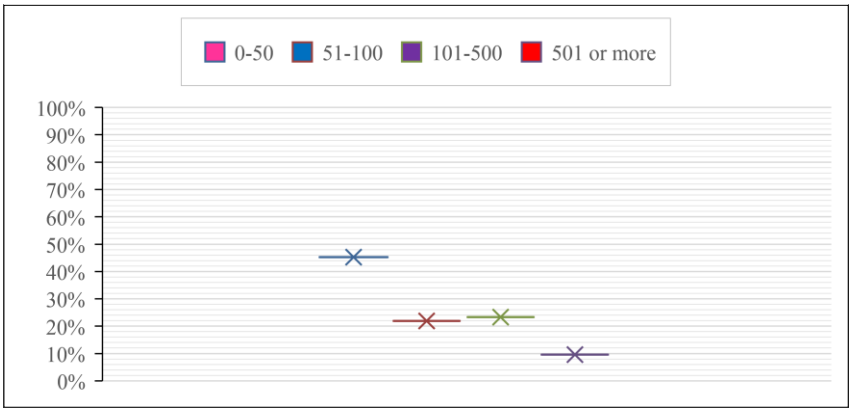

Figure 4. Male range

In another aspect, within the research, female participants were identified, with a minimum of 15 women and a maximum of 1696 participants. In the range of 101-500, 37% were recorded, followed by 34% in the range of 0-50. The mean number of participants was *M*= 173.68, with a standard deviation of *SD* = 252.74. Figure 5 graphically presents this detailed information.

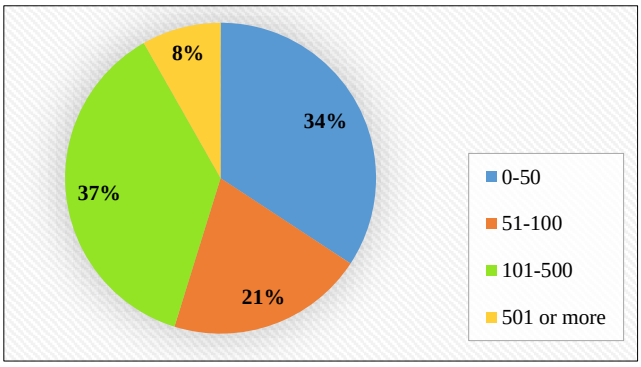

Figure 5. Female rank

3-4- Countries Where the Research Was Conducted

In the comprehensive analysis of all the research, a notable global interest in the subject of emotional intelligence, social skills, and anxiety stands out. Spain leads with 12%, followed by Mexico (14%), Peru (7%) and Colombia (7%). These percentages represent the level of interest of each country in the topic and are shown in Figure 6.

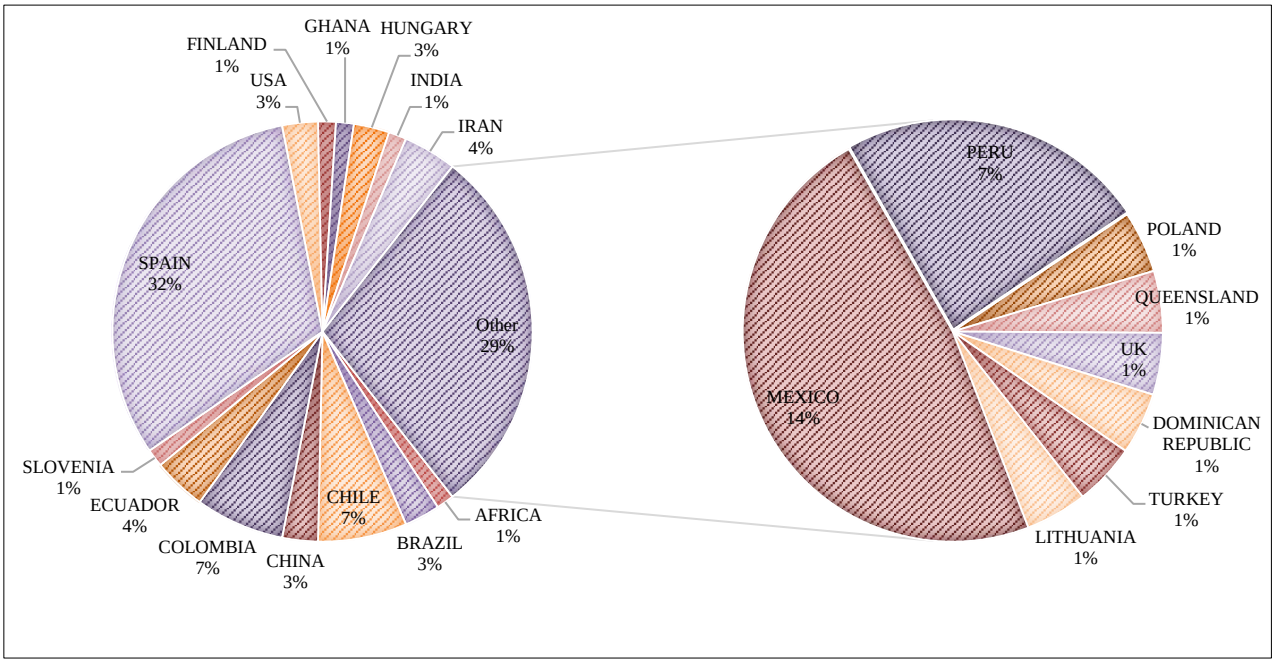

Figure 6. Researching countries

3-5- Continents Where Research Was Conducted

Based on these data, the continent with the highest number of studies on emotional intelligence is the Americas, with 47%, followed by Europe with 41%, and Asia with 8%. These percentages reflect the geographical distribution of the studies and are graphically represented in Figure 7.

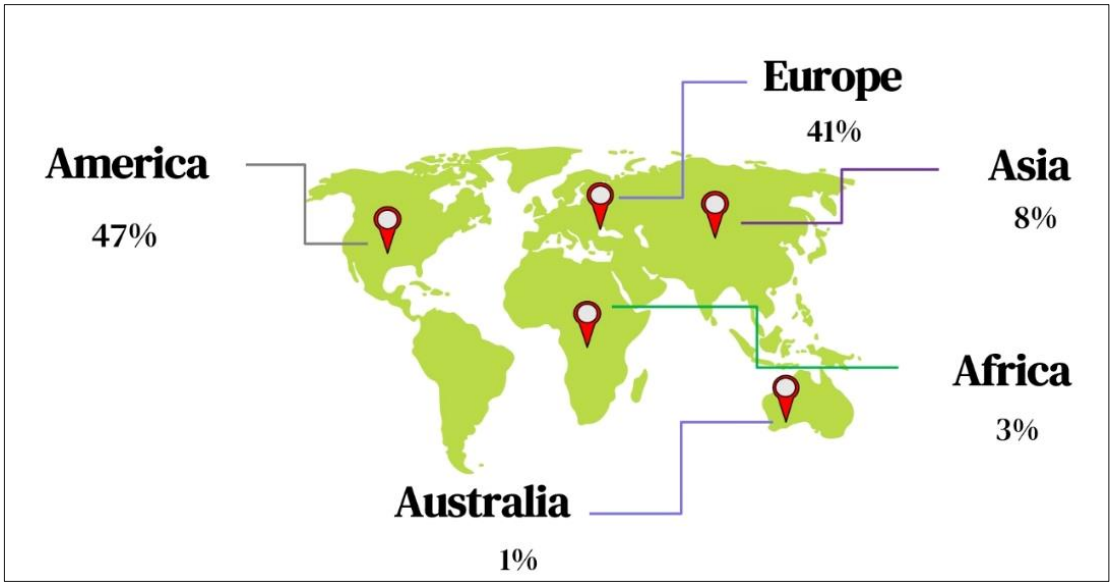

Figure 7. Continents where research was conducted

3-6- Type of Population

The data collected in various investigations allow us to observe the unusual characteristics of the population studied. Data were found that identify university students, representing 30%, followed by high school students, with 19%, evidencing variations among the different typification of the population. These values are graphically represented in Figure 8.

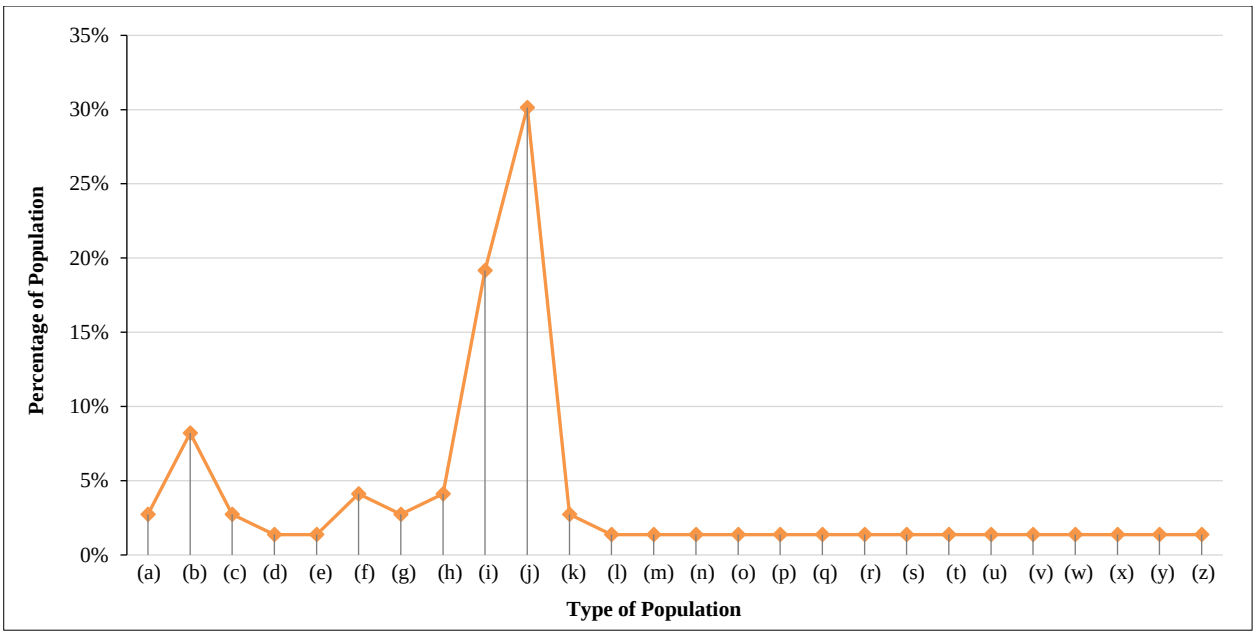

Figure 8. Graphical representation of the type of population. The variables observed in the figure are (a) adolescents, (b) adults, (c) older adults, (d) dancers, (e) athletes, (f) teachers, (g) nurses, (h) elementary school students, (i) high school students, (j) university students, (k) physicians, (l) women with physical violence, (m) child population, (n) people undergoing psychological therapy, (o) cancer patients, (p) patients with suicide attempts, (q) patients with affective disorder, (r) patients with drug use, (s) HIV patients, (t) surgery patients, (u) patients with spinal cord injury, (v) people involved in physical activity, (w) medical residents, (x) priests, (y) victims of displacement, and (z) volunteers.

3-7- Applied Tests

On examining the items, it was found that, out of a set of 197 tests used in the research, 32% corresponded to emotional intelligence tests. Within this percentage, 7% was allocated to assessing social skills, while 6% focused on measuring anxiety. Consequently, the remaining 56% was allocated to other types of tests. Figure 9 visually illustrates these percentages.

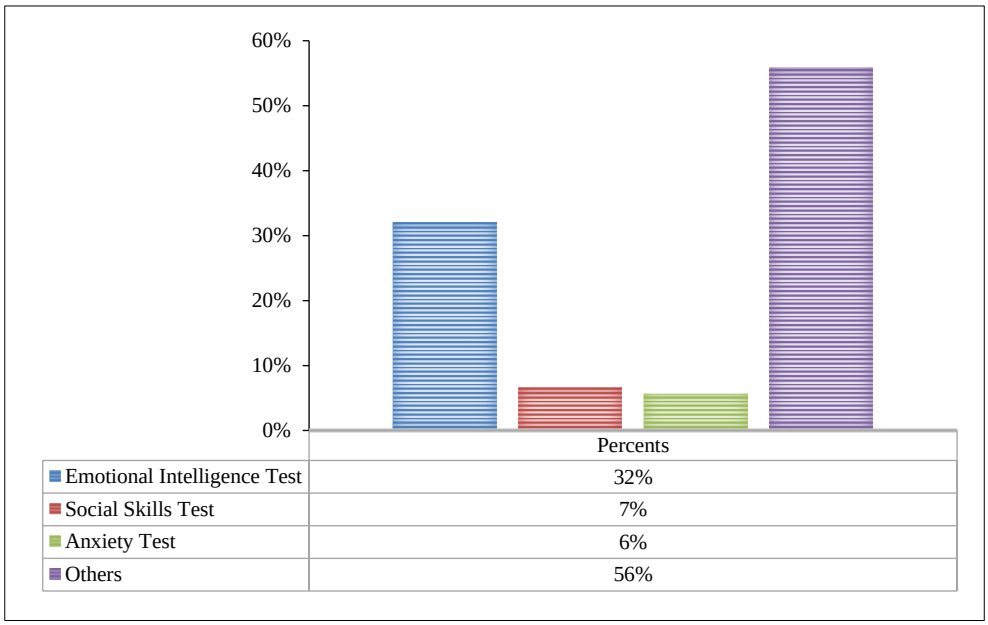

Figure 9. Tests applied in the investigations

3-8- Research Results

In relation to the results analyzed, most of the studies indicated a prevalence of 26% of high emotional intelligence, followed by 22% of low emotional intelligence and 19% of medium emotional intelligence. These percentages are graphically represented in Figure 10.

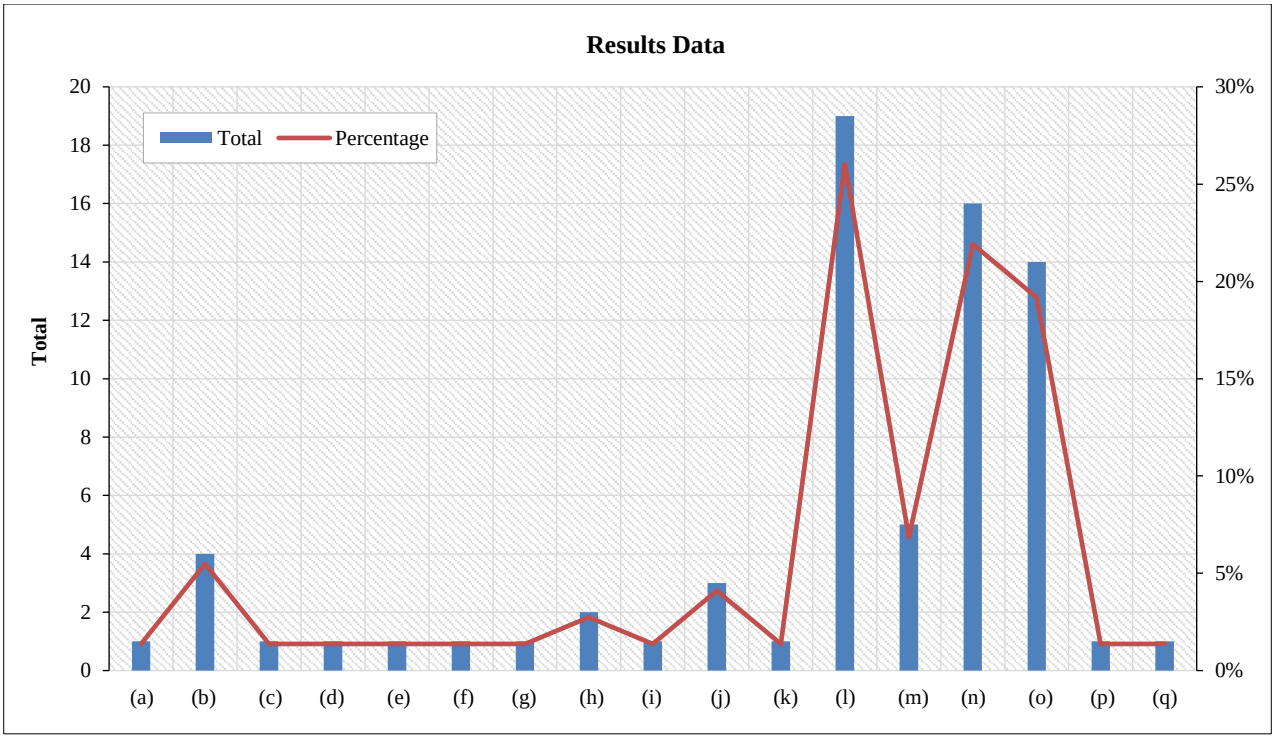

Figure 10. Graphic representation of the research results. The variables observed in the figure are (a) high coping, (b) high anxiety, (c) high anxiety and high emotional intelligence, (d) high anxiety and low emotional intelligence, (e) low anxiety and high emotional intelligence, (f) medium anxiety, (g) medium psychological well-being, (h) high social skill, (i) low social ability, (j) medium social ability, (k) low emotional intelligence, (l) high emotional intelligence, (m) high emotional intelligence and high social ability, (n) low emotional intelligence, (o) medium emotional intelligence, (p) medium emotional intelligence and medium social ability, and (q) mild sleepiness.

3-9- Benefits

When analyzing the benefits of each research, it was observed that most studies highlighted a relationship between emotional intelligence and social skills (10), followed by the presence of a specific level of emotional intelligence (9) and the link between emotional intelligence and anxiety (6). These data are presented graphically in Figure 11.

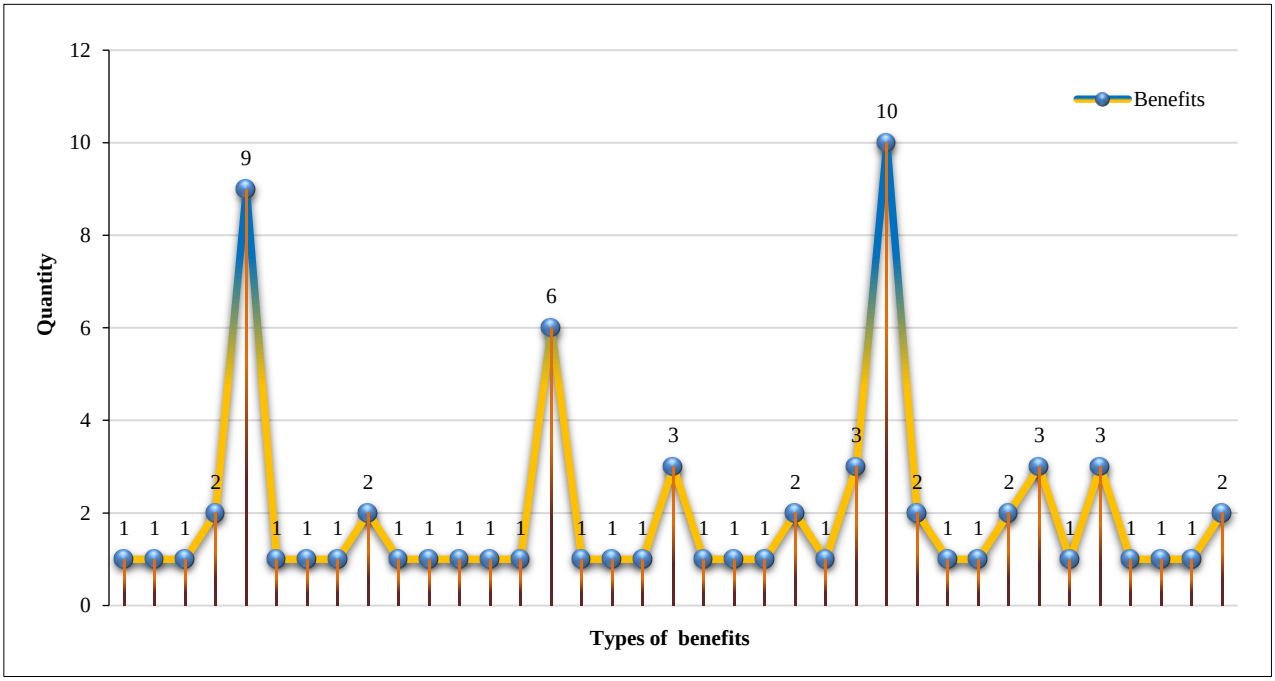

Figure 11. Graphical representation of the benefits of the research. This figure shows the variables with relationship between emotional intelligence and social skills (10), level of emotional intelligence (9), relationship between emotional intelligence and anxiety (6), among others.

3-10-Research Findings

According to the data collected, most studies show a prevalence of emotional intelligence at 33%, followed by psychological well-being at 7%, and the presence of emotional control at 4%. These results are presented visually in Figure 12.

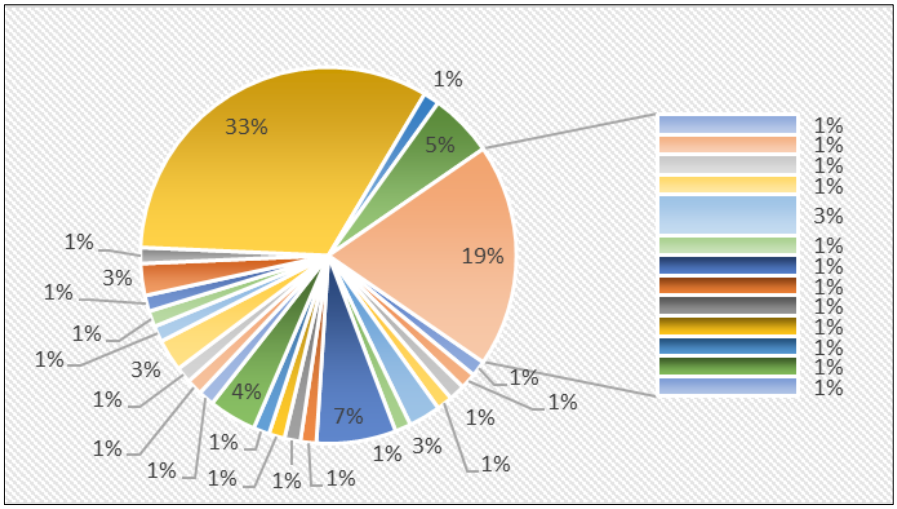

Figure 12. Research findings

3-11-Limitations

In the last aspect addressed, some of the limitations present in the research were identified. All these limitations were linked to the purpose of identifying the main situations that generated difficulties during the research. The three main limitations were: the use of self-report instruments, which represented 21%, followed by the absence of declaration of conflicts of interest by the authors, with 14%, and cross-sectional design research, which constituted 13%. These details are graphically represented in Figure 13.

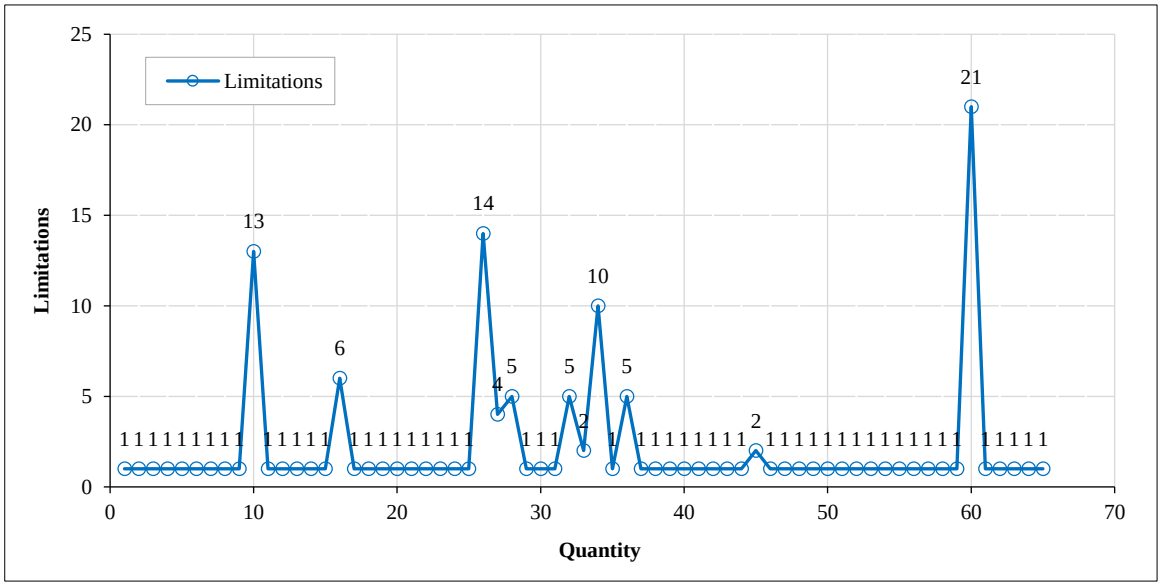

Figure 13. Graphical representation of research limitations. This figure shows the variables with the use of self-report (21), the authors do not refer to conflict of interest (14), cross-sectional design (13), small sample (5), among others

4- Discussion

This research sought to establish the relationship between emotional intelligence, social skills, and anxiety, with the aim of understanding the impact of emotional intelligence on the psychological well-being and quality of life of individuals. The results of the systematic review, which covered 73 articles mostly from America and Europe, reveal that emotional intelligence in adults is associated with a high score of 26%, indicating an effective coping strategy. However, in subjects with diseases, a low emotional intelligence of 22% is observed, suggesting an affectation on the quality of life. In university students, an average emotional intelligence of 19% is evidenced, associated with an improvement in personal skills with greater efficacy in emotional intelligence.

Therefore, adults in whom a positive relationship between high emotional intelligence and high social skills was identified develop optimal emotional well-being and control. However, in situations of high anxiety, a decrease in the relationship between emotional intelligence and social skills is observed, affecting psychological well-being. In summary, the research achieves the general objective by establishing the relationship between emotional intelligence, social skills, and anxiety, highlighting the importance of these factors in the quality of life of different population groups.

The results of this research reveal the connection between the previously mentioned variables, prominent levels of emotional intelligence are observed, highlighting self-emotional management as the dimension with the highest scores, while emotional utilization shows the lowest values. Likewise, it is identified that 90% of the evaluated population presents low or moderate levels of anxiety both in the state and in the trait, while only 10% experience high anxiety. It is relevant to highlight that people with higher scores in emotional intelligence show lower levels of anxiety, both in the state and in the trait [85].

Regarding the limitations of the study, the presence of articles in other languages was identified in the databases, such as Portuguese, Chinese, Russian, or Japanese. On the other hand, some articles were evidenced which were analysis or elaboration of tests on emotional intelligence. Despite these limitations, the research marks a starting point for future studies, being a pressing issue for both mental health and society in general [86-90].

In conclusion, it is suggested that future research should standardize the terms in the databases, considering that in Spanish it is more common to find articles related to social skills. In addition, the need to expand studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence, social skills, and anxiety is highlighted. It is recommended to review the variables presented and explore their relationship in various population settings. Despite the limitations, future research is urged to follow a clear methodological guide and to deepen the relationship between the variables to gradually contribute to people's psychological well-being. Quasi-experimental or experimental studies are also proposed to generate a quality scientific perspective and establish statistical comparisons between groups. This will make it possible to identify significant differences or similarities between the evaluated groups.

5- Conclusion

This article has described the relationship between emotional intelligence, social skills, and anxiety. The quantitative systematic review suggests that the age range in which this type of study is conducted is between 16 and 30 years of age. Most of the studies on this subject are carried out in Europe and are conducted on university students. The countries with the most scientific development in this line of research are Spain, Mexico, and Chile. The continent where the least research is carried out is Africa. Furthermore, in terms of territories where this research is carried out, in Latin America it is important to continue with this type of research in this context in order to improve the mental health of the population. In terms of gender, those who benefit most from this type of research are men. To a great extent, instruments are applied to evaluate emotional intelligence, which allowed the conclusion that a high level of emotional intelligence allows solving social conflicts in a better way and the person reduces anxiety levels and has a better adaptation to the environment. The results of this research contribute to the issue of psychological treatment in which relevance should be given to activities that help in emotional intelligence so that they can better manage the levels of anxiety that are generated in the various activities performed by human beings.

6- Declarations

6-1- Author Contributions

Conceptualization, C.R-G. and B.R-N.; methodology, C.R-G. and D.D-M.; software, C.R-G. and B.R-N.; validation, C.R-G., B.R-N., and D.B-M.; formal analysis, C.R-G., B.R-N., and D.B-M.; investigation, C.R-G., B.R-N., and D.B-M.; resources, C.R-G.; data curation, C.R-G.; writing—original draft preparation, C.R-G., B.R-N., and D.B-M.; writing—review and editing, C.R-G., B.R-N., and D.B-M.; supervision, C.R-G.; project administration, C.R-G.; funding acquisition, C.R-G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

6-2- Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

6-3- Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

6-4- Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

6-5- Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

6-6- Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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