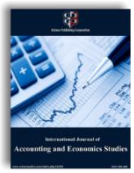
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Research paper



Trait Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement in Gulf Countries: A Bibliometric Perspective

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Abstract

Employee engagement is a crucial factor in organizational success, as it significantly impacts productivity, job satisfaction, and overall performance. This bibliometric study examines the relationship between trait emotional intelligence (TEI) and employee engagement within the Gulf countries from 2015 to 2025. Using data extracted from the Scopus database, which consists of 530 documents. The study maps research trends, identifies influential authors and journals, and highlights key thematic clusters. Findings indicate a growing scholarly interest in the impact of trait EI on workplace performance, with significant contributions from leadership and psychological empowerment research. The analysis reveals that facets of trait EI, such as happiness, self-motivation, and emotion regulation, are strong predictors of employee engagement. Moreover, well-being exhibits a positive relationship with engagement, whereas emotionality demonstrates a negative correlation. Leadership emerges as a critical factor, as emotionally intelligent leaders enhance engagement through improved motivation and communication. This study provides valuable insights for organizations in the Gulf countries to develop EI-based interventions for workforce optimization. Future research should investigate sector-specific applications and the impact of digital transformation on trait Emotional Intelligence (EI) and employee engagement. While Scopus offers broad coverage, the reliance on a single database may omit relevant regional insights. Future studies are encouraged to use additional databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar for triangulation.

Keywords: *Employee Engagement; Trait Emotional Intelligence; Workplace Performance; Gulf Countries.*

1. Introduction

Employee engagement, or the degree of a worker's dedication and connection to their work, is crucial in today's rapidly changing organizational environment to achieve optimal performance and productivity (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Trait emotional intelligence (TEI), the capacity to recognize, use, and successfully regulate emotions, significantly impacts this engagement (Petrides et al., 2007). Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to the relationship between trait Emotional Intelligence (EI) and employee engagement, particularly in the context of the Gulf countries' unique cultural and economic circumstances, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Middle Eastern nations (AlLouzi, A. S., & Alomari, K. M., 2023).

According to research, employee engagement and trait emotional intelligence (EI) appear to be significantly correlated. Jackson (2014) found that trait EI partially mediates the relationship between work engagement and both in-role and extra-role job performance. According to Barreiro & Treglown (2020), pleasure, emotion regulation, self-motivation, and a facet-level representation of trait EI nearly double the variance in engagement compared to a single global representation (lbayati, Y.K., Allouzi, A. S., Abdalaziz, M. M. O., Al-Ali, M., & Yas, H., 2025). Of the four components of emotional intelligence, emotionality has a sizeable negative link with employee engagement, while well-being has a strong positive correlation (Arora et al., 2012). Furthermore, it has been found that mood repair, a component of emotional intelligence, fosters high levels of employee engagement, as evidenced by increased vigor, dedication, and absorption (Sarangi & Vats, 2015). According to the study, emotional intelligence (EI) is a significant predictor of positive work attitudes and behaviors. Hence, any organization hiring or training new hires should consider this construct (Ibrahim, E., Sharif, H., & Aboelazm, K. S., 2025).

Moreover, Trait EI has been found to positively influence work engagement dimensions such as vigor, dedication, and absorption (Extremera et al., 2018). Moreover, this association is mediated by psychological empowerment, which promotes job satisfaction (Gong et al., 2020). Certain aspects of trait EI, including happiness, emotion management, self-motivation, and emotion regulation, have been identified as predictors of employee engagement (Amador Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Additionally, trait EI has been identified as a mediator of the relationship between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being processes and overall well-being outcomes, including life satisfaction and positive affect (Bhullar et al., 2013). These findings underscore the importance of viewing trait EI as crucial in fostering positive work attitudes, and they suggest that enhancements in emotional intelligence may lead to increased employee engagement and job satisfaction (Allouzi, A. S., 2024).

In Gulf countries, research indicates that leaders' emotional intelligence has a substantial impact on employee engagement levels (Aboelazm, K. S., 2024). In the private sector of Bahrain, it was found that leaders with emotional intelligence exhibit more favorable levels of

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employee engagement, highlighting the importance of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and social skills for effective leadership (Abdulla et al., 2023). This relationship underscores the importance for Gulf leaders to develop emotional competencies to enhance workforce engagement (Allouzi, A.S., Alomari, K.M., Maghaydah, S., 2024). In Saudi Arabia, EI has been found to enhance job satisfaction and performance for employees, with evidence of a mediating role for employee engagement (Alferaih, 2021). Similarly, in the Gulf region, a study in the medical field found a strong positive correlation between EI and physicians' job performance (Al Shdaifat & Al Zyoud, 2021). Overall, these findings collectively indicate that emotional intelligence (EI) is a significant driver in promoting employee engagement and enhancing job performance among employees from various sectors and countries in the Gulf region, underscoring the importance of EI in work settings. Employee engagement is an evolving concept with an expansive literature base, and recent bibliometric analyses provide synthetic views of the paths this literature has taken and priorities for future inquiry (Khulbe et al., 2023). These analyses serve a critical purpose in illuminating the scholarly conversation on employee engagement and the variables that influence it, such as emotional intelligence, as they play out within the Gulf context (Khudhair, H. Y., Jusoh, A., Mardani, A., Nor, K. M., & Streimikiene, D., 2019).
Organizations in the Gulf region are facing increasing pressure to attract, retain, and engage a highly diverse workforce across various industries, including oil and gas, healthcare, and technology (Aboelazm, K. S., Tawakol, F., Ibrahim, E., & Sharif, H., 2025). While trait EI has been shown to influence employee engagement in global contexts significantly, the Gulf region's distinct cultural norms, leadership styles, and economic conditions create a need for context-specific insights. By employing a bibliometric approach, this study not only synthesizes existing literature but also identifies research gaps and emerging trends, offering actionable knowledge for organizations to enhance employee engagement through emotional intelligence interventions. Such an investigation is vital for equipping leaders and policymakers in the Gulf with evidence-based strategies to sustain organizational performance and employee well-being in a highly competitive and rapidly evolving business environment.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research design

The data for this study were sourced from Scopus. Articles were retrieved using the Boolean search technique, incorporating specific keywords to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature (Yas, H., Mardani, A., & Alfarttoosi, A., 2020). The search strategy employed a combination of key terms across three thematic areas. The first set of keywords focused on emotional intelligence and related constructs: "trait emotional intelligence," "emotional intelligence," "EPI," and "MEQ." The second set targeted work-related attitudes and behaviors, including employee engagement, work engagement, and job satisfaction. Lastly, the third set concentrated on the geographical context, encompassing "Gulf countries," "Middle East," "Saudi Arabia," "United Arab Emirates," "Kuwait," "Qatar," "Oman," and "Bahrain." The Boolean search method was applied by linking these keyword groups using the "AND" operator to refine the dataset and ensure relevance to the study's objectives. While Scopus offers broad coverage, the reliance on a single database may omit relevant regional insights. Future studies are encouraged to use additional databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar for triangulation (Aboelazm, K. S., Tawakol, F., Ibrahim, E., & Ramadan, S. A., 2025).
The retrieved articles in Figure 1 spanned a publication period from 2015 to January 13, 2025, the date of data extraction. Initially, 780 articles were identified; however, only journal articles categorized under education-related sections (Business, Management and Accounting, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, and Social Sciences) were selected for further analysis. After applying the inclusion criteria, the final dataset consisted of 530 journal articles, totaling 18,570 references.
(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("trait emotional intelligence" OR "emotional intelligence" OR "epi" OR "meq") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("employee engagement" OR "work engagement" OR "job satisfaction") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Gulf countries" OR "Middle East" OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "United Arab Emirates" OR "Kuwait" OR "Qatar" OR "Oman" OR "Bahrain")).

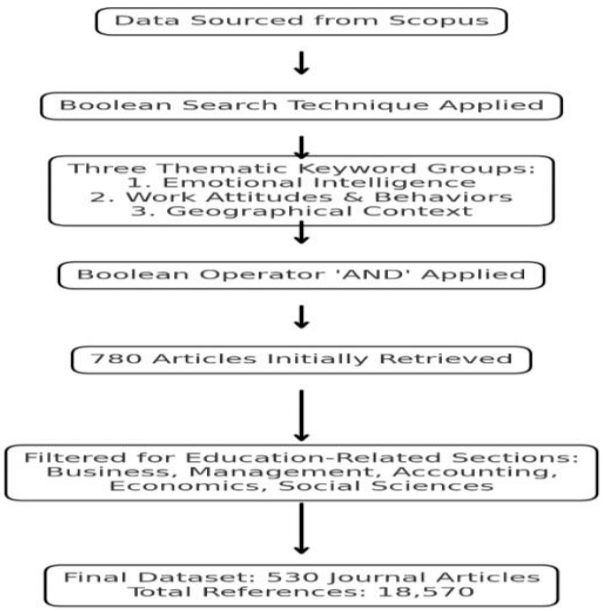


Fig. 1: Flowchart of Data Collection and Filtering Process.

2.2. Data analysis

To conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis, this study utilized various tools and techniques to examine the structure and impact of the retrieved literature. VOSviewer was explicitly designed for network visualization and clustering analysis, as it has been recognized for

processing large-scale bibliometric data to create a visual graph (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Data for this research were extracted from Scopus using the Scopus Export feature and visualized through VOSviewer, a tool with a wide range of applications in bibliometric research, including mapping research trends over the last few decades and identifying key authors and co-occurrence relationships between keywords and references (Donthu et al., 2021). While Scopus offers broad coverage, the reliance on a single database may omit relevant regional insights. Future studies are encouraged to use additional databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar for triangulation.

3. Results

3.1. Number of publications over time

The trend in the number of publications related to Trait Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement in Gulf Countries over the past decade reveals a significant increase in research interest, particularly in recent years.
From 2015 to 2018, the number of publications remained relatively low, fluctuating between 13 and 30 papers per year. However, starting in 2019, a noticeable upward trend emerged, with the number of publications increasing from 61 in 2019 to 75 in 2020. This indicates a growing recognition of the importance of emotional intelligence in workplace engagement within the Gulf region. The period from 2021 to 2023 witnessed a sharp increase in academic output, with publications more than doubling from 57 in 2021 to 103 in 2022 and then further escalating to 144 in 2023. This surge suggests an increasing focus on the role of trait emotional intelligence in shaping organizational behavior, employee satisfaction, and overall workplace performance. The highest peak was observed in 2024, with 182 publications indicating a notable increase in scholarly interest, possibly driven by the post-pandemic shift toward emotional well-being and engagement in professional settings. However, in 2025, the number of publications appears to have dropped significantly to 14, possibly due to a shift in research focus, changes in data availability, or shifting academic priorities. Figure 2 presents the data, highlighting a growing body of research on this topic that emphasizes its relevance in understanding workforce dynamics in the Gulf countries. Future studies may provide deeper insights into the impact of emotional intelligence on leadership effectiveness, job satisfaction, and productivity across diverse organizational settings. It should be noted that 2025 data reflects only publications indexed through January 13, 2025, which explains the observed drop and does not indicate a declining trend.

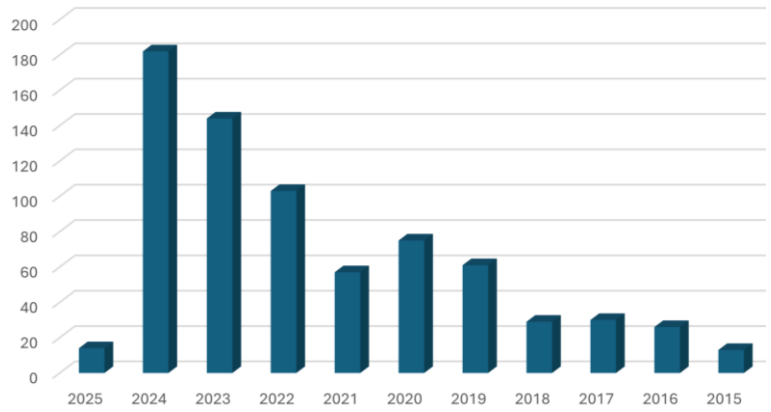


Fig. 2: The Publication Trend.

3.2. Leading authors, journals, and institutions

TEI and Employee Engagement in Gulf Countries is an emerging area of research, with several scholars making significant contributions to the field. Parayitam, S. leads with five published documents, followed closely by Ababneh, Aboramadan, Alsakarneh, Alzoraiki, Ateeq, De Clercq, Jabeen, Jambulingam, and Milhem, M., each with four contributions. These authors explore various dimensions of TEI, including its role in workplace motivation, leadership effectiveness, and employee performance within the Gulf's unique socio-cultural and organizational context. The findings from their research highlight the profound impact of emotional intelligence on employee engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity in a dynamic work environment characterized by the interplay of cultural diversity, the integration of an expatriate workforce, and advancements in management practices. The combined insights from these research studies lay the groundwork for a TEI roadmap regarding the effects of organizational commitment, workplace stress, and work culture in Gulf region organizations. As shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Leading Authors

Author Name	Document
Parayitam, S.	5
Ababneh, O.M.A.	4
Aboramadan, M.	4
Alsakarneh, A.	4
Alzoraiki, M.	4
Ateeq, A.	4
De Clercq, D.	4
Jabeen, F.	4
Jambulingam, M.	4
Milhem, M.	4

In addition, Table 2 identifies the primary academic sources that contribute to studies on TEI and Employee Engagement in Gulf Countries, showcasing the most impactful journals in this field of research. The Journal of Textile and Apparel Technology and Management has the most papers (28), suggesting its important contribution to this area of study, as does Cogent Business and Management. Also published

extensively on this topic are The International Journal of Organizational Analysis (17) and Problems and Perspectives in Management (16), with their primary focus on organizational behavior, leadership, and employee engagement.
Insights into sector-specific applications of TEI, particularly in human resource practices and leadership effectiveness, are provided through specialized journals such as Engineering, Construction, and Architectural Management (12), Benchmarking (10), and the International Journal of Human Resource Management (10). Moreover, Administrative Sciences (9) emphasizes the importance of TEI in fields beyond educational institutions, particularly in administrative settings, and the International Journal of Educational Management (9) demonstrates the relevance of TEI for academic leadership. Quality Access to Success (8) and the SA Journal of Human Resource Management (8) further refine these discussions with articles addressing employee well-being, employee engagement, and employee performance metrics across various workplace contexts.

Table 2: Leading Journals

Source Title	Document
Cogent Business And Management	28
International Journal Of Organizational Analysis	17
Problems And Perspectives In Management	16
Engineering, Construction, And Architectural Management	12
Benchmarking	10
International Journal Of Human Resource Management	10
Administrative Sciences	9
International Journal Of Educational Management	9
Quality Access To Success	8
SA Journal Of Human Resource Management	8

Lastly, Table 3 highlights the leading academic institutions that have made significant contributions to research on TEI and Employee Engagement in Gulf Countries, showcasing the universities that have significantly shaped the field. A significant research interest in the role of TEI in employee motivation, leadership, and workplace productivity was found among the leaders of the ranking, University Sains Malaysia and Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, who each published 11 documents.
In close succession, the University of Jordan (10) and Qatar University (10) provide theoretical contributions on key issues related to TEI, focusing on human resource management and organizational performance. The roles of University Utara Malaysia (9) and Abu Dhabi University (9) are also significant in the TEI applications context across diverse workplace environments, particularly within the Gulf region, which is recognized for its culturally diverse and expatriate environments. Moreover, Taylor's University Malaysia (8), Zayed University (7), and the College of Business and Economics at Qatar University (7) emphasize the importance of TEI in business leadership, as do employee engagement and decision-making processes. King Abdulaziz University (6) supports this assertion by demonstrating that emotional intelligence leads to job satisfaction and enhances relationships in the workplace.

Table 3: Leading Institutions

Affiliation	Document
University Sains Malaysia	11
Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University	11
The University of Jordan	10
Qatar University	10
University Utara Malaysia	9
Abu Dhabi University	9
Taylor's University Malaysia	8
Zayed University	7
College of Business and Economics, Qatar University	7
King Abdulaziz University	6

3.3. Geographic distribution

Table 4 presents the geographic distribution of research contributions on TEI and Employee Engagement, highlighting the countries that have made significant academic contributions in this domain. India leads with 150 published documents, demonstrating its intense research focus on emotional intelligence in workplace settings, particularly in diverse and rapidly growing industries. Malaysia follows with 90 publications, reflecting its increasing emphasis on TEI's role in human resource management, leadership, and employee motivation. The Gulf region is well-represented, with Saudi Arabia (61), the United Arab Emirates (48), and Indonesia (45) contributing substantial research on the impact of TEI on workforce engagement in culturally diverse environments. Other major contributors include Pakistan (59), China (55), the United Kingdom (55), the United States (54), and Australia (35), highlighting the global relevance of TEI research in various organizational contexts.

Table 4: Geographic Distribution

Country/Territory	Document
India	150
Malaysia	90
Saudi Arabia	61
Pakistan	59
China	55
United Kingdom	55
United States	54
United Arab Emirates	48
Indonesia	45
Australia	35

Figure 3, a network visualization from VOSviewer, further illustrates the collaborative research connections between these countries. India, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom emerged as key hubs, forming strong co-authorship networks with other regions. The United States and China also play a central role in bridging the gap in TEI research between Western and Eastern academic institutions.

The color-coded clusters in Figure 3 represent regional research collaborations, showing how different countries contribute to shaping the understanding of TEI in employee engagement and organizational behavior.

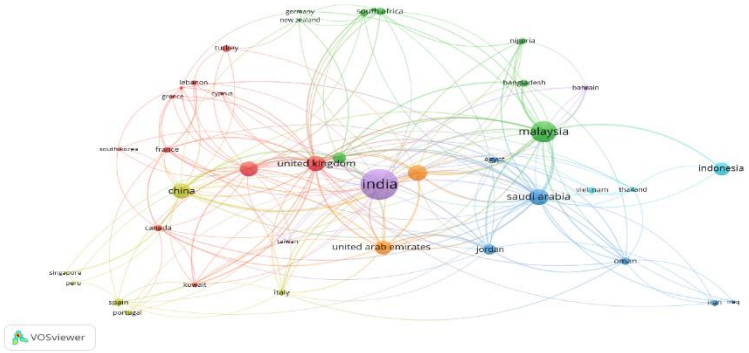


Fig. 3: Network Visualization of Geographic Research Collaboration on TEI and Employee Engagement.

3.4. Co-authorship networks

The co-authorship network analysis in this study identifies key highly cited references with a minimum of 20 citations, resulting in 27 documents meeting the threshold (Aboelazm, K. S., Tawakol, F., Dganni, K. M., & AlFil, N. Z., 2024). The most influential work is by Fornell and Larcker (1981), which evaluates structural equation models and has garnered 94 citations, with the most substantial total link strength (204), indicating its foundational impact on structural equation modeling. This work has been heavily relied upon in later emotional intelligence studies (Aboelazm, K. S., Ibrahim, E., Sharif, H., & Tawakol, F., 2025).

The co-authorship network analysis in this study identifies key highly cited references with a minimum of 20 citations, resulting in 27 documents meeting the threshold (Khudhair, H. Y., & Mardani, A., 2021). The most influential work is Fornell and Larcker (1981), which evaluates structural equation models, garnering 94 citations and a total link strength of 204, indicating its foundational impact on the field of structural equation modeling. Other pivotal works include Salovey & Mayer (1990) study introduces a framework for emotional intelligence, defining it as a set of skills for recognizing, regulating, and utilizing emotions effectively, reviewing debates on emotion's adaptive nature, its role in intelligence, key components, and its impact on mental health (57 citations, link strength 82) and Saks (2006) explores the antecedents and consequences of job and organizational engagement through the lens of social exchange theory, distinguishing between the two forms of engagement and identifying key predictors such as perceived organizational support, job characteristics, and procedural justice, while also demonstrating their mediation effects on job satisfaction, commitment, turnover intentions, and organizational citizenship behavior, addressing the gap in academic research on employee engagement. (53 citations, link strength 161), reflecting substantial interdisciplinary contributions (AlKhamaiseh, M. A., Allouzi, A., & Karima, K. R. I. M., 2025). Additionally, Henseler et al. (2015) introduced a new criterion for discriminant validity, with 49 citations and a link strength of 118, reinforcing the importance of methodological advancements (Yas, H., Mardani, A., Albayati, Y. K., Lootah, S. E., & Streimikiene, D., 2020). Classic theoretical contributions, such as Blau's (2017) work on social exchange theory and Kahn's (1990) study on personal engagement, continue to shape research in management and psychology. Podsakoff et al. (2003) addressed common method biases in behavioral research, garnering 46 citations and a link strength of 107. Furthermore, Goleman's works on emotional intelligence (1995, 1998), along with Cropanzano & Mitchell's (2005) interdisciplinary review of social exchange theory, highlight the broad applicability of these frameworks across various disciplines. The strong interconnections among these references indicate that studies on structural equation modeling, emotional intelligence, social exchange theory, and engagement research serve as foundational pillars in co-authorship networks, significantly shaping contemporary research across marketing, management, and psychology.

Table 5: Co-Authorship Networks

Authors	Document	Journal	Citations	Total Link Strength
Fornell & Larcker (1981)	Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error	Journal of Marketing Research	94	204
Salovey & Mayer (1990)	Emotional intelligence. Imagination, cognition, and personality	Cognition and Personality	57	82
Saks (2006)	Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement	Journal of Managerial Psychology	53	161
Henseler et al. (2015)	A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling	Journal of the academy of marketing science	49	118
Blau, P. (2017).	Exchange and power in social life	Routledge	46	124
Kahn(1990)	Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work	Academy of Management Journal	46	152
Podsakoff et al. (2003)	Common Method Biases in Behavioral Research: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommended Remedies.	Journal of Applied Psychology	46	107
Goleman (1998)	Working with emotional intelligence	NY: Bantam Books	45	48
Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005)	Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review	Journal of Management	40	113
Goleman, D. (1995)	Emotional Intelligence	New York, NY: Bantam Books.	40	40

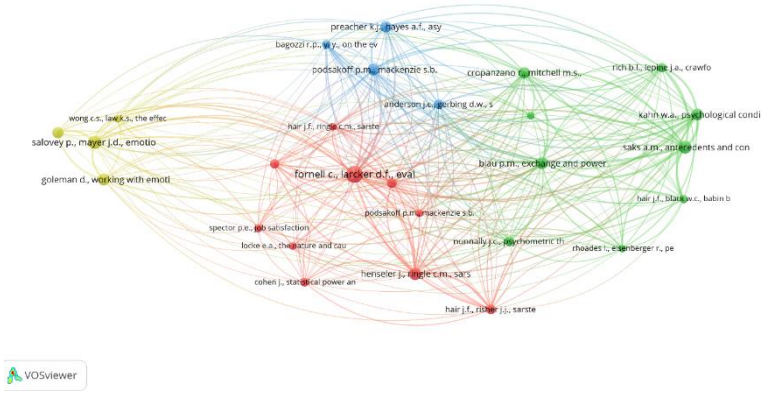


Fig. 4: Co-Authorship Network Analysis of Trait Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement.

3.5. Thematic analysis

The co-occurrence analysis identified 78 keywords, with eight major themes emerging from the dataset. The table presents the most frequently occurring keywords, along with their total link strength, which measures the strength of each keyword's connection to others in the dataset. See Table 5.

Table 5: Co-Occurrence Analysis

Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
emotional intelligence	226	257
employee engagement	103	141
job performance	103	145
employee performance	95	138
organizational commitment	42	56
turnover intention	38	73
human resource management	36	116
transformational leadership	36	70
leadership	33	95
work engagement	23	62

The network analysis in Figure 4 reveals four primary clusters in trait EI and employee engagement research, covering themes related to leadership and motivation (Red), HRM and commitment (Green), well-being and work-life balance (Blue), and methodological advancements and performance (Yellow). These clusters illustrate the interconnected nature of research on emotional intelligence and employee engagement, highlighting the multidimensional factors influencing workplace dynamics.

3.5.1. Red cluster – emotional intelligence (EI) & transformational leadership

The Red Cluster focuses on the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Transformational Leadership, examining how leaders with high EI influence employee motivation, engagement, and organizational success through inspirational and empathetic leadership styles. Gilani et al. (2024) examined how emotional intelligence (EI) in family business members fosters stakeholder relationships and promotes long-term business success through a relationship marketing perspective. Using a mixed-methods study in SMEs, they found that enhancing emotional intelligence (EI) helps manage family conflicts and strengthens customer and supplier relationships, thereby facilitating sustained business growth. Eyoun et al. (2024) investigate the relationships between emotional intelligence, work-life balance, and retention among hotel frontline employees, finding that emotional intelligence has a positive influence on both factors, with Generation Y employees benefiting more in terms of work-life balance than Generation X employees (Yas, N., Salem, O., AlLouzi, A. S., Abdalaziz, M. M. O., Marks, A., & Al-Jumaili, A., 2025). However, generational differences did not moderate the EI-retention relationship, offering insights for HR professionals. Sumadi et al. (2024) examined the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) and Big Five personality traits on leadership success in hospital administration in the Gulf Region, finding that while individual traits had a low to moderate effect, their combined influence accounted for 56% of transformational leadership variance and 26% of management leadership effectiveness variance, highlighting the significant role of personality and EI in leadership performance. Malaeb et al. (2023) investigated the relationships between self-leadership, employee engagement, and perceived organizational support in Lebanon and the UAE, finding that both self-leadership and organizational support have a positive influence on engagement. However, organizational support enhances the impact of self-leadership only in the UAE, providing valuable insights for HR strategies in the Middle East (Allouzi, A. S., & Yas, N., 2024). The impact of Transactional Leadership (TL) on job satisfaction (JS) in Saudi Arabia reveals that extrinsic (EM) and intrinsic motivation (IM) significantly influence JS, with TL enhancing the effect of EM while weakening the impact of IM, emphasizing the need for leadership strategies that align with employee motivations to improve morale and productivity (Aljumah, 2023).

Thawabieh & Ali (2024) examined the mediating role of human resource (HR) practices in the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and effective leadership within Jordan's telecommunication sector, finding that HR practices enhance the impact of EI on leadership effectiveness, emphasizing the need for strong HRM strategies to foster emotionally intelligent leaders and drive organizational success while recommending open communication and a culture of transparency (Allouzi, A. S., 2024). Moreover, Lopes et al. (2025) investigated the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions, finding that toxic leadership is positively associated with employee turnover intentions. Developed emotional intelligence moderates this relationship; employees who can use and regulate their emotions are more likely to leave toxic organizations for better working conditions (Aboelazm, K. S., 2023). Paredes-Saavedra et al. (2024) explored the relationships between emotional intelligence, team leadership, organizational culture, work climate, and creative synergy as factors that enhance team effectiveness, based on a sample of Peruvian university employees, concluding that leadership and emotional intelligence are strong predictors of team effectiveness and that organizational culture, work climate, and creative synergy act as mediators, providing

value not only for theory but also by presenting actions that can optimize teams of work within universities (Elyat, M. N., Al Bayati, N. Y., Al Baloushi, N. A., Sarhan, M. I., Marks, A. A., Khudhair, H. Y., & Allouzi, A. S., 2024).
Moreover, Rehman et al. (2020) analyzed the influence of project manager leadership behaviors on project-related job attitudes and outcomes experienced by employees across various industries in Asia. They found that leadership had a significant impact on levels of job satisfaction, job involvement, job commitment, retention, and performance, providing important guidance for maximizing the potential of workers in project management. Lastly, the study conducted by Konanahalli & Oyedele (2016) highlighted the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in cross-cultural adjustment (CCA) for British expatriates in Sub-Saharan Africa, China, the Middle East, and the Indian Subcontinent; the findings showed that EI was a significant predictor of work, interaction, and general adjustment, underlining the importance of EI in expatriate adjustment and informing HR managers about potential areas to evaluate during expatriate selection (Shwedeh, F., Yas, N., & Abdijabar, Z., 2024).

3.5.2. Green cluster – organizational commitment & human resource management

The Green Cluster represents research on organizational commitment and human resource management (HRM), focusing on how HR practices, social exchange theory, knowledge sharing, and psychological capital influence employee engagement, retention, and workplace performance within various organizational contexts (Aboelazm, K. S., & Ramadan, S. A., 2023). Discussing the mediating role of employee engagement between job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment in private life insurance companies based in Coimbatore, India, Arulsenthilkumar (2024) found that both job involvement and job satisfaction significantly driven organizational commitment, with employee engagement partially mediating the job involvement-commitment relationship, but not the job satisfaction-commitment link, showing the importance of engagement strategies for increasing workplace commitment (Khudhair, H. Y., Jusoh, A., Nor, K. M., & Mardani, A., 2021). Moreover, Alnehabi (2024) examined the relationship between organizational identification, commitment, and corporate reputation in the Saudi Arabian banking sector, finding that employee performance partially mediates these relationships, emphasizing the crucial role of employee-organization connections in enhancing bank reputation and performance, with practical implications for bank managers to optimize operations and drive business success. Bourezg et al. (2024) explored the factors influencing job satisfaction among women in Jordan, using a mixed-method approach to analyze employment attributes, relationships, and career opportunities, finding that education and income positively impact satisfaction, while longer work hours and experience have a negative effect, offering practical insights for improving workplace retention and productivity in the Middle East (Yas, H., Aburayya, A., & Shwedeh, F., 2024).
Aggarwal et al. (2022) investigated whether procedural justice, distributive justice, and organizational support increase the engagement of information technology (IT) (Aboelazm, K. S., Dganni, K. M., Tawakol, F., & Sharif, H., 2024). Data were collected through surveys and analyzed using data from 276 IT employees in India. Through structural equation modeling, significant relationships were found between procedural justice, distributive justice, organizational support, and employee engagement. The results they found showed that the more engaged the employee was, the higher their organizational commitment and the lower their intentions to leave. This offers practical implications for HR practitioners and senior managers seeking to enhance employee retention and commitment in the workplace. Similarly, Ouerdian et al. (2021) investigated the effect of leader-member exchange (LMX) and Affective Organizational Commitment as mediators on the relationship between Tunisian Employees' Enhanced Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Turnover Intention. The two features, in turn, promote more outstanding organizational commitment while suppressing turnover intention in workers with higher EI because employee attitudes depend on the quality of the relationship with their manager (Yas, H., Jusoh, A., Nor, K.M., Jovovic, N., Delibasic, M., 2022). These findings underscore the importance of developing behaviors informed by emotional intelligence, which can help foster leader-follower relationships and lead to increased employee retention.
For instance, Hefnt (2021) examined the moderating role of ethical climate on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention in the context of travel agencies in Alexandria. A strong ethical climate fosters a positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment while also reducing turnover intention. More directly linked to job satisfaction and commitment, Saridakis et al. analyzed the reciprocal impact using a large-scale employer-employee dataset from Britain (WERS 2011). Their study confirmed that job satisfaction leads to enhanced organizational commitment and that commitment, in turn, leads to higher job satisfaction, emphasizing their interdependence. Using instrumental variable (IV) analysis to overcome endogeneity concerns, the study provided strong evidence that commitment and satisfaction are mutually interdependent workplace variables. The implications of these findings are noteworthy, as they expand upon existing knowledge regarding the interrelationship between these factors that impact employee commitment and retention in the workforce (Aboelazm, K. S., & Afandy, A., 2019).

3.5.3. Blue cluster – work-life balance & employee well-being

The Blue Cluster focuses on the intersection of work-life balance and employee well-being, highlighting the factors that influence job satisfaction, productivity, and overall quality of life in the workplace. Work-life balance has a significant impact on the well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction of female faculty in Indian higher education, with supervisor support and high-commitment work systems playing a crucial role. At the same time, organizational strategies show no significant effect (Jamunarani & Syed, 2024). Eyoun et al. (2024) examine the impact of emotional intelligence on work-life balance and retention among U.S. hotel frontline employees, revealing that Generation Y experiences a stronger positive relationship between emotional intelligence and work-life balance, while generational differences do not moderate the link between emotional intelligence and retention (Aboelazm, K., 2022). Sergio et al. (2015) tested the relationship between emotional intelligence, work/family conflict, and work values among customer service representatives from the Middle East, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, India, and the Philippines, revealing significant correlations between emotional intelligence and both work/family conflict and work values, and proposing organizational development programs to enhance diversity management in call centers (Yas, H., Jusoh, A., Streimikiene, D., Mardani, A., Nor, K. M., Alatawi, A., & Umarlebbe, J. H., 2021).
Begum (2024) investigated the connection between work-life balance and mental health among Indian managers, finding that emotional intelligence serves as a positive moderator, strengthening this relationship. However, the study found no significant gender-based differences, highlighting the importance of gender-neutral workplace policies that align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Similarly, Parray et al. (2022) examined work-life balance as a mediator in the relationship between psychological capital and employee attitudes among healthcare employees in North India. Their findings demonstrated that work-life balance fully mediates the link between psychological capital and key employee outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions, reinforcing its central role in workplace well-being (Aboelazm, K. S., 2021).
Shifting to the healthcare sector, Gautam et al. (2024) examined the effect of work-life balance on job satisfaction and intention to quit among private hospital nurses. The study concluded that work-life interference has a detrimental effect on job satisfaction and turnover intentions and that job satisfaction acts as a partial mediator in these relationships. These findings suggest that workplace interventions

aimed at minimizing work-life imbalance can be effective in improving employee retention. Applying this research to academia, Soomro et al. (2018) investigated the impact of work-life balance, work-family conflict, and family-work conflict on perceived employee performance among university faculty members. They found that job satisfaction moderated the relationships in which work-family conflict influenced performance positively, while family-work conflict had no effect (Saeed, M. D., & Khudhair, H. Y., 2024).

3.5.4. Yellow cluster – organizational performance & structural equation modeling

The Yellow Cluster examines the relationship between organizational performance and structural equation modeling, highlighting how advanced analytical techniques facilitate the assessment of the impact of various managerial and operational factors on business success. Alsakarneh et al. (2024) investigate the effects of human resource management practices on performance in Jordanian tourism projects, revealing that performance appraisal, recruitment, selection, and compensation enhance organizational performance, which is mediated by employee engagement. Mgammal et al. (2022), Investigating how COVID-19 affected employee work performance in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, this study found that feelings about work, as well as psychological state, significantly influenced work performance with concern over COVID-19 thought to act as a moderator, suggesting economic investments during crises, as well as more flexible policies, to sustain a high level of productivity (Yas, H., Alkaabi, A., ALBaloushi, N. A., Al Adeedi, A., & Streimikiene, D., 2023).
Nurul et al. (2023) investigated the impact of training and development on organizational performance in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector, identifying employee engagement, commitment, and retention as key mediators of the training-performance relationship. Furthermore, it was determined that performance appraisal moderates the association between engagement and retention on overall performance. These findings underscore the importance of implementing formal HR strategies to foster a productive and dedicated workforce. Deshpande and Srivastava (2023) examined the contributions of green training and green work-life balance towards sustainable organizational performance. Dhir et al.'s (2020) research revealed the significance of emotional intelligence as a moderating variable. It proposed a holistic framework that links green HR practices with environmental sustainability, employee performance, and organizational effectiveness, providing significant insights into leadership development and strategic human resources to foster long-term corporate success. Shayya's (2018) study also evaluates the role of organizational culture in the performance of the Lebanese public education sector, concluding that although organizational culture has some impact on performance, its influence is limited. The impact of broader society is significant, raising questions about the applicability of Western organizational theories in the Middle East (Yas, N., Dafri, W., Yas, H., & Shwedeh, F., 2024).
Additionally, Hilton et al. (2021) investigated the impact of transformational leadership on organizational performance in Ghanaian commercial banks. They found that job satisfaction plays a significant mediating role, highlighting the importance of leadership based on employee well-being and the relevance of corporate governance to performance. Meanwhile, Moradi et al. (2022) examined the impact of spiritual, emotional, and organizational intelligence on the performance of audit firms in Iraq. Their findings confirmed a robust positive link between the domains of intelligence and the performance of firms. However, they did not find social capital to be a mediating factor in these effects, indicating that internal resources may take precedence over external social networks in influencing performance outcomes. Viewing this from a broader perspective, Almatrooshi et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review of the determinants of organizational performance (Yas, H., Dafri, W., Sarhan, M. I., Albayati, Y., & Shwedeh, F., 2024). They developed a framework that describes the connection between cognitive, emotional, and social competencies and leadership effectiveness. Li, M. (2018) demonstrated how these competencies work together to enhance employee performance and organizational effectiveness, providing significant insights into leadership development and strategic human resource practices. Combined, these studies demonstrate that organizational performance consists of benefits from leadership, intelligence, and HR systems, as well as costs associated with unsustainable practices.

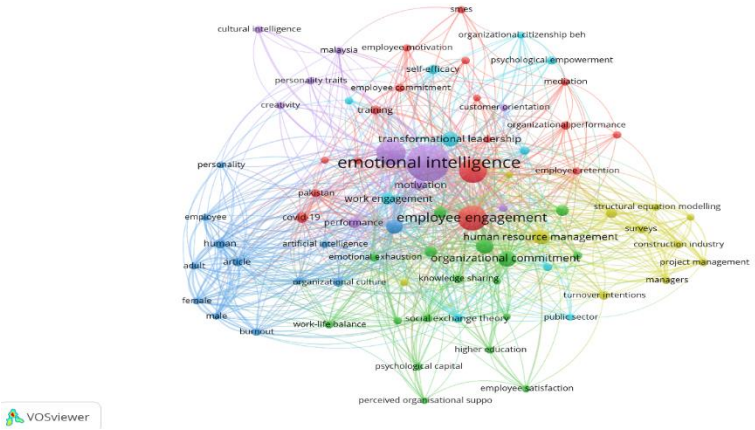


Fig. 5: Network Analysis of Trait Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the research trends, key contributors, and collaborative networks surrounding TEI and Employee Engagement in Gulf Countries. Results underscore a growing academic interest in the area over the past 10 years, particularly an increasing number of publications since 2019. From Indian Banks to Emirates Airlines, these movements also signal the growing recognition of emotional intelligence as a key driver of workplace engagement and, ultimately, improved performance in Gulf-based organizations. Consistent with its rising prevalence, the study found an even sharper increase over time in publications from 2021 to 2024, suggesting a growing awareness of TEI's effects on workplace dynamics. A dip follows this peak in 2024 and 2025, as it is still early in the year. This trend suggests the need for further research on emerging facets of TEI, including digital transformation, remote work, and AI-driven workplace analytics.
The analysis of leading authors from the topmost productive organizations contributing to the TEI discourse, with five publications led by Parayitam, S., highlights the importance of collaborative research. Additionally, key figures such as Ababneh, O.M.A., Aboramadan, M., and De Clercq, D., have made respective impactful contributions, underscoring the collaborative nature of the research environment. Their

approach condenses TEI into motivation, leadership, and employee performance within the socio-cultural context of the Gulf region. Furthermore, prominent journals such as Cogent Business and Management and the International Journal of Organizational Analysis play pivotal roles in disseminating research related to TEI. In particular, they foster contemporary discourse on the applications of TEI in human resource management, leadership development, and employee engagement. Universiti Sains Malaysia, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, and other institutions have made significant contributions to the field of TEI research. Their insights underscore the diminishing relevance of emotional intelligence in the employee motivation and productivity equation. Also notable are the University of Jordan, Qatar University, and Universiti Utara Malaysia, a testament to the growing importance of TEI in more academically and industry-focused contexts in the Gulf and broader Asian regions. In terms of geography, India leads the way in TEI research output, followed closely by Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. It also highlights considerable academic and professional interest in how emotional intelligence influences workplace activities and organizational practices, given these countries' significant contributions to relevant research. The network diagram further supports this by illustrating the collaborative nature of research in the field of TEI, with major international co-authorship networks emerging from key hubs, including India, Malaysia, and the UK.

The co-authorship links highlight key texts that have significantly contributed to shaping the field of TEI scholarship. Fornell and Larcker (1981) emphasized the significance of methodological soundness in any TEI-related study – a foundation painstakingly built upon by the structural equation modeling literature. In a similar vein, Salovey and Mayer (1990) proposed a seminal model of emotional intelligence that continues to guide recent research. Saks (2006) emphasizes the importance of employee engagement, which is linked to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, thereby underscoring the relevance of TEI in the workplace. Other important studies, such as Henseler et al. (2015) on discriminant validity and Podsakoff et al. (2003) on possible method biases, highlight methodological innovations that characterize TEI research. These connections point toward TEI research, with a strong focus on psychology, management, and organizational behavior. The network visualization of co-authorship illustrates that TEI studies have benefited from cross-disciplinary integration, which has further enhanced the applicability of TEI studies in real-world workplace settings.

Employing thematic analysis, the results suggest that EI is a key predictor of employee engagement, with particular aspects, such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, and motivation, which are found to play a crucial role in engendering greater vigor, dedication, and absorption in the workplace (Extremera et al., 2018). Moreover, EI remains a mediator in the relationship between job satisfaction and performance (Alferaih, 2021). This implies that emotionally intelligent employees are better equipped to cope with workplace challenges, sustain motivation, and enhance overall productivity. At a leadership level, a study based in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE has validated that leaders with higher emotional intelligence (EI) implicitly enhance employee engagement through supportive work environments, increased teamwork, and improved communication (Abdulla et al., 2023). This highlights the need to implement EI competencies in managers for organizational success in the Gulf's highly competitive business environment. Additionally, work-life balance, psychological empowerment, and organizational support served as significant moderators in the relationship between EI and engagement. Supportive leadership, career development opportunities, and work-life balance lead to higher levels of employee engagement and lower turnover intentions in the Gulf region (Gautam et al., 2024). Relational proximity is supported by research, which shows that it can be enhanced by specific cultural and economic aspects of the area; however, there is a need for limited local knowledge and research to be conducted. The results confirm that Trait EI is an important contributor to the increase in employee engagement across industries in the Gulf region. As a result, in a rapidly evolving economic and cultural climate, organizations need to make EI training a priority, create HR policies that support performance through EI, and develop leadership strategies that reflect the current direction of the workforce.

4.1. Implications

4.1.1. Theoretical implications

This study makes several contributions to the existing body of knowledge on trait emotional intelligence (EI) and employee engagement, particularly within the unique socio-economic and cultural contexts of the Gulf countries. This study synthesizes a diverse pool of bibliometric information to identify current trends, influential authors, and evolving theoretical perspectives on EI and worker engagement. The most significant theoretical contribution of this study is its validation of the positive impact of trait EI on employee engagement through various psychological and organizational mediators, including psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, and leadership effectiveness. In addition, it provides empirical evidence that psychological capital plays a mediating role in explaining the link between emotional intelligence (EI) and employee well-being, thereby supporting existing theories in EI (Petrides et al., 2007) and engagement (Kahn, 1990). Additionally, the bibliometric approach enables the identification of significant research gaps. While a substantial body of literature exists on EI in Western contexts, fewer studies have explored its impact within the Gulf region. The findings underscore the importance of future research in exploring cultural nuances, particularly the role of collectivist values, religious influences, and hierarchical workplace structures in moderating the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and employee engagement. Another significant gap pertains to sector-specific insights, as much of the literature focuses on general organizational settings rather than industry-specific applications such as oil and gas, healthcare, and education, key economic sectors in Gulf countries.

4.1.2. Practical implications

The findings of this study highlight the crucial role of emotional intelligence (EI) in promoting employee engagement, particularly within the organizational landscape of the Gulf region. To create an emotionally intelligent workplace, organizational leaders, HR practitioners, and policymakers must move beyond traditional management paradigms. While those are all noble pursuits, investing in leadership development programs that focus on self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills will go a long way in improving morale in the workplace and enhancing productivity. Furthermore, organizations must incorporate EI assessments into their human resources (HR) policies, including recruitment, performance appraisals, and career development initiatives. Moreover, they ensure that engagement strategies align with people's intrinsic motivations. These assessments can help identify employees with branch emotional competencies. With a growing focus on mental well-being, EI-based wellness initiatives can help reduce workplace stress and foster resilience, especially in high-pressure job sectors such as healthcare, finance, and construction. Additionally, since the workforce in the Gulf region is highly diverse, adopting EI-based cross-cultural training can foster strong workplace communication, inclusivity, and collaboration among employees from diverse backgrounds.

In addition to internal organizational strategies, leveraging the wellspring of EI-based approaches in performance evaluation, team dynamics, and employee retention can yield significant benefits when used to gain a competitive edge. Emotional metrics lead to an organization where employees are balanced in their approach toward success and are engaged in the systematic growth of the company. Encouraging

open communication, constructive feedback, and conflict resolution through EI-driven initiatives can foster stronger team cohesion and promote a more harmonious workplace. Additionally, considering the high expatriate turnover in the Gulf region, organizations need to utilize EI diagnostic information to create customized engagement programs that lead to job satisfaction and retention. Additionally, from a policy standpoint, embedding EI training within national workforce development initiatives could foster a robust pipeline of talent, ensuring that emerging leaders possess the emotional capabilities required to propel organizational success into the future. By implementing these strategies, organizations in the Gulf region can cultivate an engaged workforce that is adaptable, resilient, and aligned with the evolving needs of the modern workplace.

5. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of TEI and its impact on employee engagement, particularly within the Gulf region. These findings align with the growing body of research that emphasizes the role of TEI in leadership effectiveness, job satisfaction, retention, and workplace productivity. Based on the analysis, several research clusters have been identified, for example, the relational study between TEI and transformational leadership, organizational commitment, and work-life balance, and the use of structural equation modeling to assess organizational performance. According to the study, emotionally intelligent leaders enhance employee engagement by fostering a workplace that supports and motivates their employees. Moreover, psychological capital, organizational culture, and human resource management practices mediate the relationship between TEI and workplace engagement, underscoring the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence into HR strategies. Additionally, it sheds light on the mediating role that work-life balance and organizational support play in improving employee engagement and reducing turnover, especially in the increasingly multifaceted and fluid workforce in the Gulf region.

5.1. Limitations of the study

Despite the rigorous bibliometric methodology employed in this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, database constraints represent a significant limitation, as the study exclusively relied on Scopus for data collection. While Scopus is a comprehensive abstract and citation database, it does not cover all relevant journals, particularly regional or non-indexed publications, that may contain valuable insights. This reliance on a single database may introduce selection bias, potentially omitting important contributions from other sources such as Web of Science, Google Scholar, or discipline-specific repositories. Although this study offers an important contribution to the understanding of TEI research, it has certain limitations. First, bibliometric analysis relies on the published literature, which may not capture the emergence of new research trends or unpublished industry reports. On the other hand, the study focuses on the Gulf countries, which results in less generalizability of the findings to other regions due to cultural, economic, and organizational differences. Additionally, the use of bibliometric approaches, although helpful in revealing general directions in TEI research, has limitations in providing in-depth information about how TEI positively impacts employee engagement and the specific mechanisms associated with this relationship. Future research could supplement bibliometric analysis with empirical approaches, such as case studies, interviews, and surveys, to gain a deeper understanding of TEI's influence across various industries.

5.2. Directions for future research

The findings of this study open several avenues for future research. First, there is a need for sector-specific studies examining the role of TEI in industries critical to the Gulf economy, such as oil and gas, healthcare, and education. The insights gained from exploring how EI impacts engagement, retention, and leadership effectiveness in these sectors will be invaluable for policymakers and business leaders. Future studies should also investigate the intersection of TEI digital transformation and artificial intelligence in the workplace. As organizations continue to implement AI-guided workforce analytics, a key area of study will be how TEI moderates the impact of digital tools on employee engagement and productivity. Longitudinal studies assessing the long-term effects of TEI on employee well-being and organizational performance would also be beneficial in providing deeper insights into its sustained impact. These findings will inform local research to investigate further how cultural and economic factors influence the integration of TEI into employee engagement processes, enabling the tailoring of management practices to align with the local workforce. Lastly, future directions, which involve broader approaches to examining TEI in the workplace, would utilize interdisciplinary research incorporating psychology, human resource management, and organizational behavior. Identifying these gaps will enable researchers and practitioners to design frameworks based on emotional intelligence, creating committed, resilient, and high-performance workforces.

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Data availability

The datasets used during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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