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Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Distress Among University Students in Digital Knowledge Environments: The Mediating Role of Information Utilisation Self-efficacy and the Moderating Role of Information Support Systems

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on psychological distress (PD) among university students in the context of digital knowledge environments in China. In particular, information utilisation self-efficacy is investigated as a mediating variable and the use of information support systems as a moderating variable. Information utilisation self-efficacy refers to students' confidence in their ability to identify, search, evaluate, manage, and apply information within digital and institutional knowledge environments and information support systems are defined as the availability and quality of information resources, digital platforms and knowledge-sharing systems that allow access to relevant information. The study used data from a questionnaire survey of 376 university students in China to test the proposed relationships by using structural equation modelling (SEM) in SmartPLS software. The results indicate that EI directly and indirectly decreases psychological distress through information utilisation self-efficacy. Furthermore, information support systems significantly strengthen the protective effect of emotional intelligence against psychological distress by facilitating access to relevant, reliable, and supportive information resources. The study extends information behaviour theory into the domain of student psychological well-being within digital knowledge environments. The findings highlight the importance of information-related competencies and digital knowledge systems in shaping students' adaptive behavioural and psychological outcomes in higher education.

Keywords: Adult Learning, Teaching/Learning Strategies, Post-secondary Education, Information Literacy, Cooperative/Collaborative Learning.

Introduction

The problem of mental health has gained concern globally within the student population over the college-age years. In the case of college students, Wan and Kuang (2025) observe the risk of psychological distress dramatically increases as students encounter new educational opportunities and additional challenges like balancing academic workloads, social relationships, financial responsibilities, and identity shifts. Ge et al. (2024) explain further that this time

frame is often characterized as a life development transition, which tends to be laden with psychological unease associated with fulfilling adult responsibilities, navigating self-governance, and career planning, undergoing emotional turbulence, intensified anxiety, and depressive symptoms. The analysis conducted by Li and Xia (2024) indicated that out of a sample population of 185,787 college students from around the globe, the average prevalence of depression was 28.4%. This figure stands in stark contrast to the rate of depression among adolescents, indicating that the mental health challenges faced during the educational period of one's life have become a matter of public health concern.

The current context of higher education is one in which students are constantly connected to digital knowledge environments, including learning platforms, institutional repositories, digital libraries and academic information resources. While information is made accessible in these settings, there is also a risk of information overload, uncertainty and cognitive overload that can worsen psychological distress and impact behavioural and emotional outcomes. From the perspective of library and information science, the capacity of students to identify, access, evaluate, manage, and apply information has gained greater significance in comprehending the adaptive behavioural responses within digitally mediated academic settings. Accordingly, students' information behaviour competencies and confidence in handling digital information resources have become increasingly important for maintaining psychological well-being and effective academic functioning in higher education institutions.

From the perspective of China, the problem is remarkably more problematic. The mental issues confronting students in universities and colleges not only arise from academic demands and work-related stress but also from sociocultural and other multifaceted factors. Sun et al. (2024b) observes how students from Chinese colleges tend to endure overwhelming expectations from their families and from society at large, especially due to a rigidly competitive schooling system and quickly evolving social structure which intensifies these burdens further. Also, students have great difficulty receiving help when grappling with psychological problems because the traditional culture's mental illness stigma, lack of emotional expression, and 'face' culture that discourages help-seeking makes it difficult for timely support and intervention (Crockett et al., 2025). In a systematic review concerning the psychological state of students in Chinese universities during the pandemic, Al-Khalil et al. (2025) observed a sharp increase in socially isolating and sedentary anxiety and depression stemming from new, often unilateral academic paradigms, thus establishing the increased psychological fragility of university students under conditions of intense chronic pressures.

Within this framework, the investigation of adaptive information-related strategies has become an important area of focus in the design and enhancement of information-oriented intervention and support systems in higher education. Of these, emotional intelligence (EI) is recognized as a major psychological asset because it enables one to identify, understand, manage, and articulate emotions, thus helping to sustain psychological equilibrium in turbulent conditions (Goleman, 1995; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). EI is intricately associated with an individual's emotional regulation skills and also affects his or her coping abilities, social interaction, and problem-solving skills. There is abundant evidence that individuals with high EI tend to experience and express lower levels of negative emotions anxiety and depression (Kahloul et al., 2024; Thomas et al., 2023). Within the Chinese context, Shi et al. (2022) demonstrated that medical students with higher trait EI showed significantly lower anxiety compared to those with lower EI at the same level of stress, suggesting EI exerts a significant buffering effect in high-pressure cultures.

EI not only affects mental health directly but also through some internal cognitive capabilities and information utilisation mechanisms indirectly. Shengyao et al. (2024) observed that EI improves students' emotional self-regulation as well as their motivation maintenance when dealing with failure and setbacks, thus aiding adaptability and adaptive behavioural resilience. Torre and Daley (2023) also noted that EI assists individuals in reconstructing their cognition of some threatening stimuli and thus lowers subjective stress and enhances the recovery process from negative emotions. EI has also been shown to help diminish cultural adaptation stress and lower depressive symptoms, as depicted by Gebregergis et al. (2020) in their study on overseas students' adaptation in China. Collectively, these studies show that EI operates beyond the emotional regulation level and promotes mental health through cognitive appraisal and behavioural pathways.

While emotional intelligence has consistently predicted college students' mental well-being, researchers are increasingly recognizing that the impact of EI differs from the more direct influence that it exerts through internal cognitive beliefs and social external resources. Self-efficacy in the current research is defined as information utilisation self-efficacy which is the degree of confidence an individual has in his/her ability to be able to search, appraise, and use information in digital and institutional knowledge systems effectively (Akpojotor, 2024). This conceptualisation extends traditional self-efficacy theory into the domain of information behaviour by emphasising individuals' perceived competence in identifying, evaluating, managing, and applying information within complex digital knowledge environments characterised by dynamic and ambiguous information flows, but locates it within the context of information behaviour in which human beings have to interact with the complex and in many cases ambiguous information context (Bandura, 1997; Marakas et al., 2022; Wilson, 1999). Emotional intelligence may influence adaptive behavioural outcomes through information-related cognitive capabilities, particularly individuals' confidence in effectively utilising information within digital knowledge environments. As postulated in Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, an individual's beliefs regarding their ability to manage challenges and tasks have a direct bearing on their behavioural motivation, emotions, and coping strategies. Existing literature shows students with higher EI tend to have higher IUSE by trusting their capacity to manage emotions and cope with challenges, thus demonstrating greater adaptability and resilience in highly demanding situations (Morales-Rodríguez and Pérez-Mármol, 2019). This construct indicates how far the people perceive that they can convert the information they have at their disposal into practical knowledge that can be used to solve the problems and make decisions. This is consistent with the research conducted on information literacy that found the confidence of the people handling and using the information has a great impact on the way people interact with information resources and behavioural outcomes (Lloyd, 2007a; Savolainen, 2007; Widén et al., 2023). Sun and Lyu's (2022) cross-sectional study using a sample of 800 Chinese university students found information utilisation self-efficacy (IUSE) significantly mediates the relationship between EI and depression/anxiety. High EI students are more likely to employ positive coping behaviours that involve problem-solving and emotional restructuring, leading to reduced psychological symptoms. Therefore, information utilisation self-efficacy in this research is not only an information-related cognitive capability but also a functional ability that influences individuals' interaction with and utilisation of information within digital knowledge environments (Tang et al., 2022). As an external informational resource, information support systems are widely acknowledged to have stress-buffering functions that alleviate psychological distress. In the current study, social support is reconceptualised as information support systems, which refer to the network of information resources, digital platforms, institutional systems, and interpersonal channels that facilitate access to relevant knowledge and information resources (Tseng, 2022). Beyond emotional and relational dimensions, this perspective emphasises the availability, accessibility, and quality of information delivered through digital and institutional support systems (Jiang et al., 2025). The information support systems can help a person to access credible information, confirm knowledge, and deepen knowledge about a complicated situation (Savolainen, 2007). The 'stress-buffering model' formulated by Cohen and Wills (1985) hypothesizes that social support during stressful situations can decrease emotionally distressing responses by mitigating perceived danger, and heightening emotional security. Dong et al. (2024) studied the effects of social support and EI, finding that high EI students with greater social support exhibited markedly lower psychological symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic. From an information behaviour perspective, these systems facilitate more effective interaction with information through knowledge sharing, improved digital accessibility, and enhanced information utilisation (Case and Given, 2016; Jarrahi et al., 2025). Moreover, Ullah et al. (2023) remarked that information support systems improve the buffering effect of EI against academic stress and bolsters students' emotional resilience. Nonetheless, within the Chinese social setting, the protective influence of social support is limited by "face culture" alongside a reluctance to seek assistance, and its operative mechanisms need more investigation. Thus, social support in this research is not limited to emotional support, but also defines the informational support that determines the interaction of users with the knowledge environments.

Though emotional intelligence, information utilisation self-efficacy, and social support have been

given a lot of focus, there are a number of gaps in the literature. To start with, a majority of the research has looked at these constructs in a purely psychological context with little regard taken in their contribution to information behaviour and knowledge environments (Wilson, 1999). Second, the concept of information utilisation self-efficacy is usually understood as an overall coping conviction with little emphasis on how individuals believe in their ability to use information effectively within digital systems even though information literacy studies have shown that it is important (Lloyd, 2007b). Third, social support is mainly discussed as an emotional or interpersonal support, ignoring its role as an information support system that provides access to, assessment of, and utilization of knowledge resources (Case and Given, 2016). As a result, integrated models explaining the interaction between cognitive capabilities, confidence in the use of information, and the use of information support structures to contribute to adaptive responses of individuals in complex and information-rich environments have not been integrated. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how emotional intelligence shapes students' interaction with digital knowledge systems and how information-related competencies contribute to adaptive behavioural outcomes within information-intensive academic environments. To fill in these theoretical and empirical gaps, this study uses Chinese university students as the research sample and intertwines self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) and social support theory (Cohen and Wills, 1985; House, 1981) to build a multi-pathway model of emotional intelligence with mediating and moderating factors. This model aims to examine how emotional intelligence influences psychological distress through information utilisation self-efficacy and how information support systems condition this relationship within digital knowledge environments. This deepens understanding of the mechanisms through which emotional intelligence influences behavioural and psychological outcomes within digital knowledge environments. It also gives an understanding of how people engage with information, make use of the knowledge resources and how they create adaptive responses across the digital and academic space. Informed by the preceding theoretical context and the identified gaps in prior research, this study strives to construct a multi-path information behaviour-oriented adaptation model wherein emotional intelligence acts as the core variable, information utilisation self-efficacy serves as the mediating mechanism, while information support systems operate as the moderating factor. This model aims to examine the impact of EI on stress, anxiety, and depression among Chinese university students and further examine the synergistic interplay between information-related cognitive capabilities and information support systems.

This study advances three major theoretical facets. First, it incorporates self-efficacy and social support theories into the EI scope of study, filling the gap where information system self-efficacy, psychological resources, and environmental resources lack integration and constructing a more coherent information behaviour-oriented adaptation model. Second, this study proposes a 'mediation + moderation' dual-pathway interrelation in emotional intelligence, thereby contributing an additional dimension to the mechanistic explanation of EI and psychological distress. Third, under the influence of face culture and low help-seeking tendencies, this study examines the boundary moderation effect of social support providing theoretical insight on cross-cultural information behaviour analysis from a Chinese perspective.

Practically, the mental health education intervention strategies in tertiary institutions could be informed by this study. Enhancing information utilisation self-efficacy and emotional intelligence among students may mitigate anxiety and depression. Universities should also strengthen digital information accessibility, information literacy support services, and institutional knowledge systems to improve students' engagement with academic information resources. In addition, restructuring information support ecosystems, particularly through low-shame, easy-to-access supportive frameworks, strengthens the cultural adaptiveness of student information and support service provision.

This paper is organized in the following manner: In the first section, the background of the problem is outlined along with the research context; In section two, the literature is reviewed with the corresponding hypotheses presented; The third section focuses on outlining the research framework and detailing the techniques for data collection and analysis; The fourth section presents the results of the empirical analysis; The fifth section elaborates the theory with the empirical findings and their contributions to the field, discussing the research results after framing them within their theoretical context; Finally, section six synthesizes the conclusions drawn from the research and indicates potential pathways for further research.

Theoretical Background and Research Hypotheses

Theoretical Background

Within information behaviour theory, individuals are viewed as active agents who continuously seek, interpret, evaluate, and utilise information within complex knowledge environments (Wilson, 1999). Information behaviour theory also focuses on the idea that the way people react to uncertain and stressful events is highly dependent on their capacity to access, interpret, and use information efficiently (Case and Given, 2016). Students in the digital academic setting, e.g., university, have to communicate with various information systems, databases, online platforms, and institutional sources of knowledge. Hence, constructs such as information utilisation self-efficacy and information support systems can be more effectively understood through their influence on information utilisation and knowledge engagement behaviours. In digital academic settings, emotional intelligence may influence how students engage with information, respond to uncertainty, and utilise knowledge resources within complex information environments. In this regard, self-efficacy theory and social support theory provide complementary perspectives for understanding how internal cognitive capabilities and external information support structures shape adaptive behavioural outcomes. Even though the two angles can complement each other, they are fundamentally distinct in their theoretical underpinnings, methods of action, and pathways of regulation, which is sufficient justification for the development of a more comprehensive multi-factor pathways model of psychological adaptation.

The theory of self-efficacy, which is based on the social cognitive framework developed by Bandura (1997), is the belief held by an individual about his/her ability to perform a task and reach a desired goal. Self-efficacy influences the capability to achieve performance in accordance to a dedicated project (Badlishah et al., 2019). This construct is conceptualized in the current research as information utilisation self-efficacy, which demonstrates the level of confidence of individuals in their capacity to search, evaluate and apply information in digital and institutional knowledge systems effectively. This perspective suggests that individuals' confidence in handling and utilising information significantly shapes their interaction with information resources and subsequent behavioural outcomes (Lloyd, 2007a; Savolainen, 2007). Rather than emphasizing emotional regulation and coping, this view puts self-efficacy as a cognitive ability that defines the effectiveness of people in their engagement with information systems (Zhuofan and Hidayat, 2025). Individuals with higher levels of information utilisation self-efficacy are more likely to actively seek information, critically evaluate information sources, and transform available information into actionable knowledge. This will be of great significance especially in complicated academic settings where efficient utilization of information has a direct impact on decision making and adaptive reactions.

The social support theory has long stressed the importance of emotional, instrumental and interpersonal support through social networks (Cohen and Wills, 1985; House, 1981). In the current research information support systems comprise information resources, digital platforms, institutional systems, and interpersonal channels that facilitate access to relevant knowledge (Tseng, 2022). This perspective reflects the evolution of information behaviour studies, where support extends beyond interpersonal interaction to include the accessibility, availability, and quality of information within digital knowledge ecosystems (Case and Given, 2016; Wilson, 1999). In this perspective, information support systems affect the behaviour of individuals by providing access to credible information, knowledge sharing, and enhancing efficiency in the use of information. Such systems are vital in assisting people to check the validity of information, lessen uncertainty, and arrive at informed choices in complicated settings. Students use formal (e.g., digital libraries, learning platforms) and informal systems (e.g., peers, social networks) to access and process information in academic contexts. Accordingly, information support systems within this context functions not only as emotional support but also as an information infrastructure that shapes individuals' interaction with digital knowledge environments.

Despite the fact that self-efficacy and information support systems belong to two different theoretical traditions, both constructs are part of the explanation of how individuals interact with information in complex environments. Emotional intelligence affects the way people perceive and react to information that is emotionally charged, whilst information utilisation self-efficacy is the factor that defines how confident people are in terms of reacting and using the information (Walsh, 2024).

Meanwhile, the information support systems bring forward the requisite infrastructure that facilitates access and validation of information (Tashkin and Hollay, 2022). These constructs come together to constitute a complete system whereby the internal cognitive abilities and the external information settings interact to determine behavioural reactions and psychological consequences.

In this regard, the present study proposes a two-tier information behaviour model in which emotional intelligence influences psychological distress through information utilisation self-efficacy, while information support systems condition this relationship by shaping individuals' access to and utilisation of knowledge resources

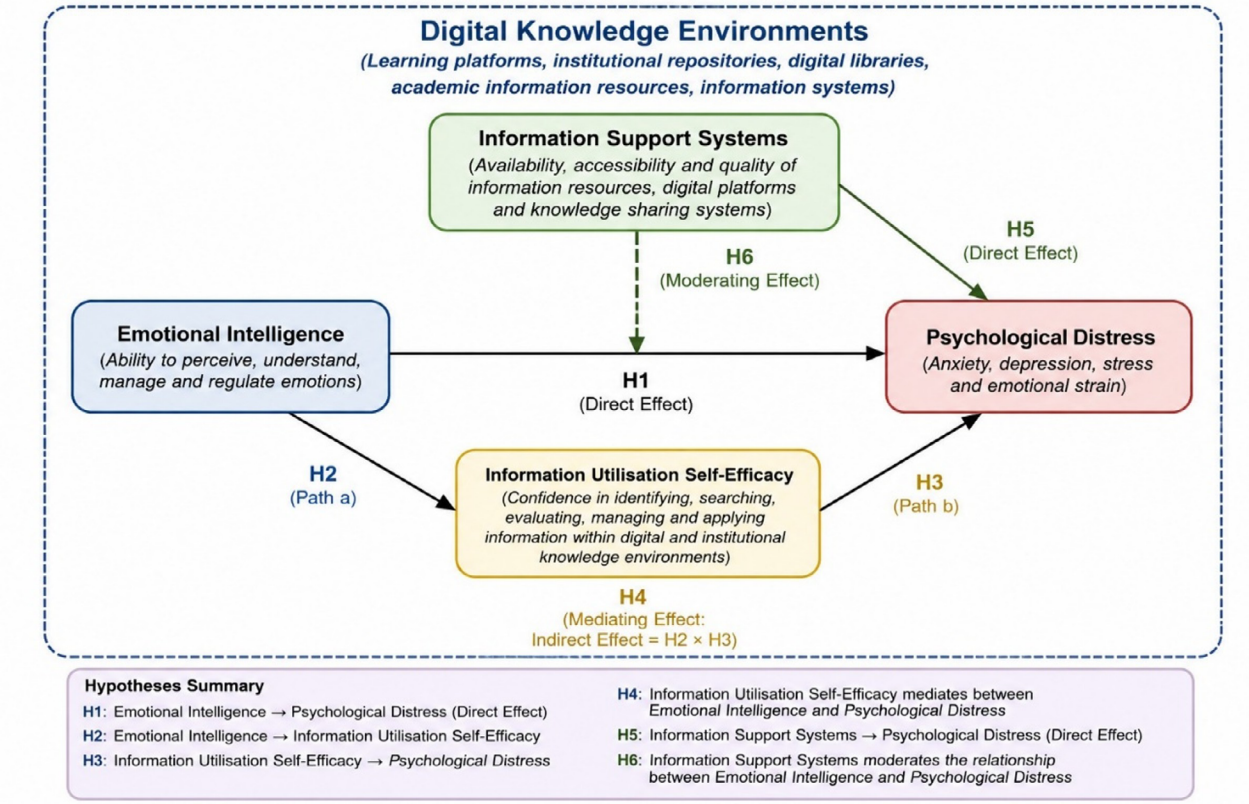

Figure 1: Model Proposed by Authors.

Hypothesis

Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Distress

EI-the capacity to read, interpret, and guide one's own and others' feelings is often singled out as an antidote to stress. By sharpening emotional perception, the construct theoretically widens the toolbox of coping responses a person can choose from. Khorasani et al. (2023) tracked university students and discovered that those carrying higher EI scores paired psychological resilience with an almost instinctive preference for positive coping tactics, which in turn lowered their self-reported stress. Ang and Lau (2024) linked good emotional intelligence to tighter emotional control, richer social networks, and measurable resilience. This suggests that emotional intelligence contributes to tighter emotional control.

Within lecture halls, the interplay sharpens further, Zhang et al. (2024) showed that EI acts in concert with mindfulness to defuse academic tension while simultaneously stoking motivation, a finding that hints at virtuous feedback loops between emotional savvy and student engagement. Different subject matter altogether, yet Ljubičić et al. (2023) work on emotional eating nevertheless echoed this protective narrative, showing that failure to regulate feelings when stressed often nudged people toward unhealthy food choices.

Shengyao et al. (2024) studied undergraduates at several Chinese universities and found that emotional intelligence is positively linked to psychological well-being. The boost in mood and resilience is especially noticeable when students also receive adequate information support systems, a pattern that highlights the importance of EI in the stress experiences typical of the Chinese educational setting.

EI plays a foundational role in how individuals process and manage emotional challenges. Theoretically, those with higher EI possess greater capacity to recognize emotional cues, regulate internal responses, and adopt adaptive strategies when facing pressure, which can significantly lower the risk of anxiety. This has been substantiated by a growing body of empirical research.

For example, studies on medical students during the COVID-19 pandemic found that individuals with strong self-awareness—an essential facet of EI—reported significantly reduced anxiety symptoms, highlighting EI's buffering effect in crisis conditions (Chen et al., 2024). Although not all EI dimensions showed equal impact, self-awareness emerged as particularly influential in regulating anxiety. Beyond academic contexts, research involving working women also revealed a moderate inverse relationship between EI and anxiety levels, suggesting the broad applicability of EI in psychological adaptation (Taylor et al., 2024). Furthermore, recent findings by Lisica et al. (2024) confirmed that EI indirectly enhances cognitive performance by reducing anxiety, reinforcing its role in emotional stability.

EI, which encompasses the ability to perceive, manage, and express emotions effectively, is increasingly recognized as a protective factor against depression. Theoretically, individuals with higher EI are more capable of identifying early signs of emotional distress, regulating negative affect, and mobilizing coping resources—thereby reducing vulnerability to depressive symptoms. This notion is supported by empirical research. For example, Franchini et al. (2025) found that interventions aimed at improving EI led to significant reductions in depression among university students with pre-existing mental health conditions. Likewise, Paucsik et al. (2024) showed that emotional skills mitigate the impact of depressive symptoms on well-being by enhancing emotional regulation capacity. Moreover, studies using emotion-based predictive models further suggest that self-awareness facilitates early detection and response to depressive states (Wang et al., 2025). In the context of Chinese higher education—where students often face intense academic and social pressures—EI is expected to serve a similar buffering function.

H1: Emotional intelligence is negatively associated with psychological distress levels among Chinese university students.

Information Utilisation Self-Efficacy

Emotional intelligence (EI), as the capacity to perceive, understand, and manage emotions, plays a foundational role in shaping individuals' confidence in handling emotionally challenging or demanding tasks. In the current study information utilization self-efficacy is the level of confidence that the individuals have to search, assess, and use information effectively in digital and institutional knowledge systems (Tang et al., 2022). This view is consistent with the information behavior studies, which highlight that the confidence of users in the management and use of information has a major impact on the user engagement in knowledge resources (Lloyd, 2007a; Savolainen, 2007). Theoretically, EI contributes to cognitive reappraisal, adaptive goal-setting, and emotional regulation, all of which enhance one's belief in their own ability to cope—i.e., self-efficacy. Bandura's social cognitive theory highlights the role of internal emotional control in self-appraisal processes. Empirically, Michinov et al. (2024) found that EI improved self-efficacy in student nurses, while Yu et al. (2023) reported that both EI and emotional regulation were significant predictors of self-efficacy in clinical settings. EI increases information utilisation self-efficacy, as it helps individuals more effectively interpret, process, and react to complex and emotionally charged information, and boosts their confidence in using information resources and putting information into practice. These findings provide a strong basis to hypothesize that:

H2: Emotional intelligence positively affects information utilisation self-efficacy

Information utilisation Self-efficacy determines how one uses the information available to him to interpret situations and act in a productive manner in complicated academic and online worlds (Tang et al., 2022). Information behaviorally, the higher the information utilization self-efficacy, the more he or she is likely to be active in the process of information, judge its relevance and credibility and put it to action. This ability helps them to make rational choices and use more effective coping mechanisms in complicated

situations (Case and Given, 2016; Wilson, 1999). It is widely recognized as a protective psychological resource that reduces the intensity of negative emotional states. When individuals believe they can manage stressful tasks, they are less likely to feel overwhelmed or anxious. According to cognitive-behavioral theory, high self-efficacy reduces maladaptive stress appraisals and enhances coping responses. Alsufyani et al. (2024) found that perceived EI reduced occupational stress via self-efficacy among healthcare workers, and Senćanski et al. (2023) observed that high self-efficacy buffered the effects of stress and anxiety among emotionally intelligent individuals. This enhances the ability to utilize information effectively, which in turn leads to more adaptive behavioral outcomes and reduced psychological strain. Hence:

H3: Information utilisation self-efficacy negatively predicts psychological distress.

Information utilisation self-efficacy mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological distress, which increases the ability of individuals to utilize information to help them process, interpret, and apply information effectively in complex environments. EI equips individuals with emotional regulation strategies that improve their belief in their own competence, which in turn lessens the likelihood of stress, anxiety, or depression. This aligns with the extended process model of emotion regulation and Bandura's triadic reciprocal determinism, which suggests that internal capacities like EI influence behavior and well-being through cognitive mediators such as self-efficacy. Khorasani et al. (2023) showed that EI-based training reduced student depression, and the effect was mediated by enhanced self-efficacy. Similarly, Yu et al. (2023) identified self-efficacy as the linking mechanism between EI and reduced burnout. Thus, self-efficacy serves as a key mechanism through which individuals transform available information into effective behavioral responses. Thus:

H4: Information utilisation self-efficacy mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological distress.

Information Support Systems

Within the literature on social support, a clear understanding of one's emotions is valuable, yet emotional intelligence (EI) alone may not sufficiently buffer stress. This research approaches social support as the information support systems, which include the accessibility and quality of information resources, digital platforms, and networks of sharing knowledge (Tseng, 2022). The availability of reliable and relevant information allows people to comprehend situations better, justify and make informed decisions. The buffering model (Cohen and Wills, 1985) availability of pertinent, valid, and helpful information materials to aid in the comprehension and decision making of individuals. Rozen and Aderka (2023) noted that although EI enhances emotional awareness, it is close social ties that directly alleviate anxiety. Similarly, Ramos-Galarza et al. (2024) found that reduced anxiety improves EI and social skills, which in turn foster supportive interactions, reinforcing the reciprocal relationship between these constructs. In collectivist societies like China, where relational harmony is highly valued, social support may play an even more critical role. University students, who are navigating academic demands and transitional life phases, often rely on their support networks to maintain emotional balance. Therefore information support systems impact the behaviour of individuals by supporting the access to knowledge, the quality of information and the effectiveness of information utilisation (Case and Given, 2016).

H5: Higher levels of information support systems are associated with lower psychological distress among Chinese university students.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological distress is moderated by information support systems, which shape students' access to and use of relevant information resources within digital knowledge environments (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Li et al., 2025). Social support in this research is understood in terms of information support systems, such as access to and quality of information resources, digital platforms, and knowledge-sharing networks that help to access pertinent knowledge. Nonetheless, the favorable impacts of EI are not actualized in a vacuum; they rely heavily on contextual variables like perceived social support. As described in social buffering theory, supportive contexts enable individuals to convert internal emotional awareness into effective coping strategies in stressful situations. This has been corroborated by Ding et al. (2023), which showed that youths with limited social support and low EI were more prone to experience stress and psychological impairment in the wake of the pandemic. Such systems allow people to receive, confirm and implement

information efficiently and empower them to use emotional intelligence to act in complex and uncertain situations (Case and Given, 2016).

Under conditions of elevated stress, social support can enhance an emotionally intelligent individual's coping and regulatory mechanisms, thereby mitigating anxiety. As noted by Pavlacic et al. (2023), social support was a stronger predictor of stress outcomes than both combat exposure and anxiety sensitivity in emotionally disordered veterans. This underscores the notion that perceived support strengthens the protective function of internal emotional resources.

Regarding depression, an inverse relationship between perceived support and depressive symptoms has been noted consistently. As highlighted by Sun et al. (2024a), nursing students with higher levels of social support reported significantly lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Kuhlman et al. (2023) also verified that adolescents with low support systems experienced greater depressive and anxious symptoms during the pandemic, irrespective of individual traits.

Conversely, limited access to reliable and relevant information resources may weaken the effectiveness of emotional intelligence in guiding individuals' adaptive responses.

H6: Information support systems moderate the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological distress

Methodology

Questionnaire

It examines the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological distress (stress, anxiety, and depression) as well as its moderating role of information support systems (ISS). Data on emotional intelligence, psychological health, and related psychosocial factors were collected through a standardized, structured questionnaire. By utilizing this method, we could effectively analyze the relevant variables of the given demographic within a coherent analysis.

It is recommended to include an indication of the sample size required. An a priori power analysis using G*Power 3.1 was conducted to estimate the minimum sample size. The calculations indicated that a sample of 77 participants would be sufficient using a medium effect size (f^2=0.15), alpha level of 0.05, power of 0.80 with one tested and three total predictors in the regression model. However, in consideration of the proposed model which includes multiple mediation and moderation pathways, a greater sample size was required to achieve adequate model stability and parameter reliability.

A total of 642 questionnaires were distributed to undergraduate University students from first to fourth year. Among them, 227 students declined to participate, and 415 completed the survey. After screening for missing responses, response time, and data consistency, 376 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. The final sample of 376 participants not only exceeds this threshold but is also adequate for conducting structural equation modelling and moderation analysis.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Participants (N=376).

Variable	Option	Freq.	Per Cent	Cum.
Gender	Female	259	68.88%	68.88%
	Male	117	31.12%	100.00%
Age	≤19	284	75.53%	75.53%
	≥20	92	24.47%	100.00%
Grade	1st year	184	48.94%	48.94%
	2st year	94	25.00%	73.94%
	3st year	52	13.83%	87.77%
	4st year	46	12.23%	100.00%
Parent education	Unable to read and write	163	43.35%	43.35%
	Primary and secondary school	150	39.89%	83.24%
	Higher education	64	17.02%	100.27%
Place of upbringing	Rural	125	33.24%	33.24%
	Town	251	66.76%	100.00%
Academic performance	Excellent 90~100	112	29.79%	29.79%
	Good 80-89	101	26.86%	56.65%
	Fair 70-79	91	24.20%	80.85%
	Pass 60-69	72	19.15%	100.00%
Total	-	376	100.00%	100.00%

This study surveyed 376 university students, with 68.88% female and 31.12% male. The majority (75.53%) were aged 19 or below, mainly from lower academic years. Parental education levels were generally low: 39.89% of students came from illiterate families, and only 17.02 % had parents with higher education. Urban students accounted for 66.76 while 33.24% were from rural areas. In terms of academic performance, 29.79% of students reported excellent grades, while 19.15% were at the passing level, as shown in Table 1. Overall, the sample is characterized by a predominance of female, junior-year, urban-background students, with limited family educational resources, making it suitable for exploring psychological and behavioral characteristics under specific backgrounds. The research is conducted in the context of digital

academic setting, where the students communicate with various information systems, such as online platforms, institutional databases, and digital knowledge resources. The context allows the consideration of the impact of the capabilities of individuals to access and evaluate information and use it on the behavioural and psychological outcomes.

Measurement Instruments

This study utilized four validated instruments to measure key psychological and behavioral constructs. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), and second-order factor modeling was applied where appropriate.

Emotional intelligence (EI) was assessed using an 11-item scale adapted from dos Santos et al. (2025), encompassing three first-order dimensions: self-emotional appraisal, use of emotions, and others' emotional intelligence. These dimensions were modeled as reflective indicators of a higher-order EI construct.

Psychological distress was measured using the 12-item DASS-12 scale (Osman et al., 2014), which includes three subscales: depression, anxiety, and stress. Each subscale comprises four items and serves as a first-order reflective construct contributing to the second-order latent construct of overall psychological distress.

Information support systems were assessed using a validated scale adapted to measure the availability, accessibility, reliability, and usability of digital and institutional information resources within academic environments. Information support systems, which in this research comprised availability, access and quality of information resources, digital platforms and interpersonal channels that enable access to relevant knowledge. The scale indicates how people believe that these systems offer them useful, reliable, and available information when dealing with complex situations and responding to them. This observation is consistent with the literature in library and information science, in which support systems are considered one of the fundamental facilitators of information access, knowledge sharing, and successful use of information (Case and Given, 2016; Wilson, 1999).

The Information Utilisation Self-Efficacy was determined with the help of a validated scale which was modified according to the previous research (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy in the current study is understood as information utilization self-efficacy that means that people are as confident as they can be in their capability to process information effectively in digital and academic contexts through search, selection, and application of information. Though the original scale measures general efficacy beliefs, its use in the present context reflects the perceived capacity of the users in dealing with information-related activities including the ability to comprehend complicated situations, make informed choices and to use knowledge to solve problems. This meaning is in line with information behavior studies where the importance of having confidence in using information has been noted in determining how individuals interact with information sources and the final behavioral response (Lloyd, 2007a; Savolainen, 2007). A pilot test involving 30 participants was conducted to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity of the questionnaire items before the full-scale survey.

SEM

Cronbach's alpha coefficients enabled the assessment of measurement reliability and construct validity across each survey scale. The study accepted internal consistency at or above 0.70 as a satisfactory level. The research utilized Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) before switching to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) within SmartPLS software to verify both convergent and discriminant validity of measurement models.

Both data analysis was conducted through SPSS version 27 and SmartPLS 4.0. The research team calculated descriptive statistics to display the sample through means and standard deviations along with frequency distributions. All study variables were computed with Pearson correlation coefficients to assess bivariate relationships. We used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in SmartPLS to test the proposed relationships: including direct effects, mediation pathways, and moderation interactions. The indirect effects of emotional intelligence on psychological distress through self-efficacy were evaluated, using bootstrapped confidence intervals to assess their significance. To explore whether ISS moderated the relationship between emotional intelligence and each of the three mental health outcomes, a moderation analysis was conducted.

Results

Assessment of Common Method Bias and Model Fit

To assess the potential for common method bias,

Harman's single-factor test was conducted. The results indicated that the first factor accounted for 42.071% of the total variance, which is below the recommended threshold of 50%, suggesting that common method bias is not a serious concern. Additionally, the goodness-of-fit indices of the measurement model further support the robustness of the data structure. The estimated model demonstrated acceptable fit, with SRMR = 0.056, d_ULS = 0.481, d_G = 0.191, and NFI = 0.917, all indicating a satisfactory model fit compared to the saturated model.

Outer Model Measurement

The psychometric properties of the measurement model were assessed to establish construct reliability and validity prior to evaluating the structural relationships within the model. This process included testing internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

The means of the constructs ranged from 2.23 (EIS) to 3.73 (AN), while the standard deviations ranged from 0.88 (ISS) to 1.17 (DE), indicating acceptable variability across items.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.923 (EI) to 0.966 (SE), and composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.935 (EI) to 0.971 (SE), all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. These results confirm that the items within each construct consistently measure the same underlying concept.

Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

The convergent validity is the degree to which a group of items converges to measure a specific construct (Hair et al., 2010 cited in Noor et al., 2018). All AVE values exceeded the 0.50 threshold, ranging from 0.549 (ISS) to 0.892 (EIU), indicating that each construct explains a substantial portion of variance in its indicators relative to measurement error. These findings support the convergent validity of the measurement model, as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Construct Reliability and Validity.

Construct	Mean	SD	α	Rho_a	CR	AVE
AN	3.730	1.075	0.941	0.941	0.958	0.850
PD	3.690	0.976	0.952	0.952	0.958	0.655
DE	3.708	1.167	0.955	0.955	0.967	0.881
EI	2.313	0.959	0.923	0.923	0.935	0.591
EIO	2.429	1.205	0.955	0.955	0.967	0.880
EIS	2.232	1.144	0.936	0.936	0.959	0.887
EIU	2.260	1.169	0.940	0.940	0.961	0.892
FA	2.551	1.099	0.942	0.943	0.959	0.853
FR	2.458	1.096	0.941	0.941	0.958	0.850
ISS	2.525	0.884	0.925	0.926	0.936	0.549
IUSE	2.395	1.028	0.966	0.967	0.971	0.808
SP	2.568	1.102	0.940	0.941	0.957	0.847
ST	3.631	1.124	0.945	0.946	0.961	0.859

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha; (rho_a); composite reliability (CR); AVE = average variance extracted.

Table 3 reports the discriminant validity of the constructs based on the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio. The diagonal values represent the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), ranging from 0.899 (IUSE) to 0.944 (EIU). All diagonal values are greater than their corresponding inter-construct correlations in the lower triangle, satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion. For instance, the correlation between DE and ST is 0.670, which is lower than the square roots of their respective AVEs (0.938 and 0.927). Similarly, the correlation between SE and EIS is 0.602, which is also below their AVE square roots (0.899 and 0.942), confirming adequate discriminant validity.

The upper triangle displays HTMT ratios, which range from 0.164 (EIO–SP) to 0.682 (AN–DE). All HTMT values fall below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating that the constructs are empirically distinct. Notably, relatively higher HTMT values appear between conceptually related constructs, such as AN and DE (0.682), and DE and ST (0.670), yet these remain within acceptable bounds.

Together, the results provide robust evidence for discriminant validity. The constructs in the model demonstrate conceptual uniqueness, allowing for reliable interpretation of structural relationships in the subsequent analysis.

Table 3: First order Discriminant Validity.

Construct	AN	DE	ST	EIO	EIS	EIU	FA	FR	IUSE	SP
AN	0.922	0.682	0.666	0.475	0.453	0.429	0.357	0.321	0.547	0.331
DE	0.647	0.938	0.670	0.520	0.544	0.547	0.326	0.370	0.579	0.236
ST	0.629	0.637	0.927	0.558	0.565	0.558	0.313	0.337	0.621	0.259
EIO	-0.451	-0.497	-0.531	0.938	0.448	0.544	0.213	0.309	0.537	0.164
EIS	-0.425	-0.515	-0.531	0.424	0.942	0.602	0.352	0.335	0.633	0.246
EIU	-0.403	-0.518	-0.525	0.515	0.565	0.944	0.233	0.265	0.629	0.206
FA	-0.336	-0.309	-0.296	0.202	0.331	0.219	0.924	0.506	0.332	0.502
FR	-0.303	-0.351	-0.319	0.293	0.314	0.250	0.477	0.922	0.322	0.487
IUSE	-0.522	-0.557	-0.594	0.518	0.602	0.601	0.318	0.308	0.899	0.236
SP	-0.311	-0.223	-0.244	0.156	0.232	0.194	0.473	0.460	0.228	0.920

Note: Diagonal values are the square roots of AVE. Upper triangle shows HTMT ratios; lower triangle shows inter-construct correlations (Fornell–Larcker criterion). Format consistent with Table 4.

Table 4 further examines discriminant validity at the second-order construct level, involving EI, Information Utilisation Self-Efficacy (IUSE), Psychological distress (PD), and Information Support Systems (ISS). The square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are presented on the diagonal, ranging from 0.803 (ISS) to 0.899 (IUSE). Each diagonal value exceeds the correlations with other constructs in the same row and column, satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

The inter-construct correlations (lower triangle) are all below 0.71, indicating moderate associations without excessive overlap. For instance, the correlation between EI and SE is 0.703, while their AVE square roots are 0.817 and 0.899 respectively. Similarly, the correlation between PD and ISS is −0.429, which is substantially lower than their AVE square roots of 0.871 and 0.803. These results affirm that the second-order constructs are empirically distinct.

In terms of conceptual separation, strong discriminant validity is particularly evident between ISS and the other three constructs, as it maintains relatively low correlations (0.358–0.546), supporting its theoretical distinctiveness as a moderating or buffering factor. Overall, the results support a well-defined second-order factor structure, enabling reliable interpretation of higher-order relationships in the model.

Table 4: Second order Discriminant Validity.

Construct	EI	IUSE	PD	ISS
EI	0.817	0.823	0.864	0.502
IUSE	0.703	0.899	0.710	0.421
PD	-0.690	-0.642	0.871	0.546
ISS	0.376	0.358	-0.429	0.803

Structural Model Results

Table 5 summarizes the model's predictive performance for the endogenous constructs Psychological Distress (PD) and Information Utilisation Self-Efficacy (IUSE). The R-square values (0.578 for PD and 0.494 for IUSE) indicate moderate explanatory power. More importantly, both Q^2_predict values are greater than zero (0.530 and 0.491), confirming that the model has acceptable predictive relevance according to the guidelines of PLS-SEM. This suggests that the model is not only theoretically sound but also capable of producing reliable predictions for new observations. The findings support the model's applicability for understanding psychological outcomes in the target population.

Table 5: Predictive Power.

Construct	R-square	R-square adjusted	Q^2predict	RMSE	MAE
PD	0.578	0.574	0.530	0.690	0.566
IUSE	0.494	0.492	0.491	0.717	0.590

The structural model revealed several significant direct effects. Emotional Intelligence (EI) exerted a strong negative impact on Psychological Distress (PD) ($\beta = –0.399$, $t = 8.306$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that individuals with higher EI experience fewer negative emotional symptoms. Additionally, EI significantly predicted Information Utilisation Self-Efficacy (IUSE) ($\beta = 0.703$, $t = 25.567$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that emotional regulation and awareness enhance confidence in handling challenges. IUSE also negatively predicted PD ($\beta = –0.270$, $t = 5.329$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the notion that higher information

utilisation self-efficacy reduces stress and emotional burden. Furthermore, Information Support Systems (ISS) showed a negative direct effect on PD ($\beta = -0.157$, $t = 4.224$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its protective role against psychological distress.

The mediating role of IUSE between EI and PD was tested through an indirect pathway. The results revealed a significant indirect effect ($\beta = -0.189$, $t = 5.214$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that part of the effect of EI on reducing distress operates through enhanced Information Utilisation self-efficacy. This partial mediation indicates that emotionally intelligent individuals are better equipped to cope with psychological challenges not only directly but also by strengthening their beliefs in their own capabilities.

The interaction between EI and ISS was found to be statistically significant ($\beta = -0.157$, $t = 5.248$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a moderation effect. Specifically, the negative relationship between EI and PD becomes stronger when ISS is high. In other words, the beneficial impact of emotional intelligence on mental health is amplified in supportive environments, highlighting the combined influence of personal and contextual factors. Detailed statistical results for all hypotheses are presented in Table 5.

Table 6: Path Coefficients and Significance Levels.

Path	β (Original)	Mean (M)	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value
H1: EI -> PD	-0.399	-0.399	0.048	8.306	0.000
H2: EI -> IUSE	0.703	0.703	0.027	25.567	0.000
H3: IUSE -> PD	-0.270	-0.270	0.051	5.329	0.000
H4: EI -> IUSE -> PD	-0.189	-0.190	0.036	5.214	0.000
H5: ISS -> PD	-0.157	-0.159	0.037	4.224	0.000
H6: ISS x EI -> PD	-0.157	-0.157	0.030	5.248	0.000

Figure 2 presents the moderating effect of Information Support Systems (ISS) on the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Psychological Distress (PD). The plot shows that the negative impact of EI on PD becomes more pronounced under high levels of ISS. In contrast, when ISS is low, the alleviating effect of EI on distress is weaker. This interaction indicates that ISS strengthens the protective role of emotional intelligence, highlighting the joint contribution of personal and contextual factors in reducing psychological strain.

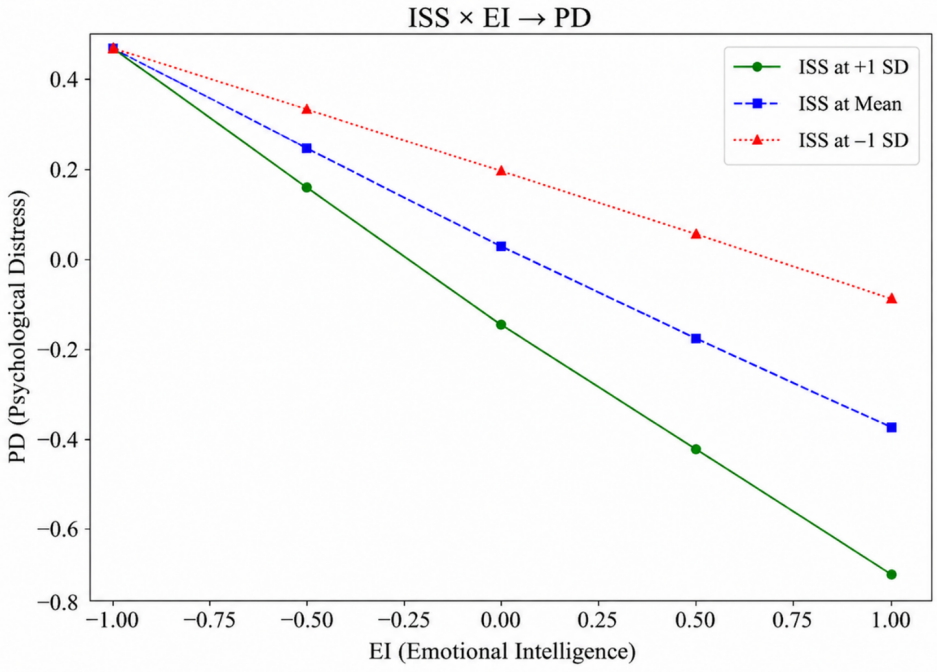

Figure 2: High ISS Enhances the Inhibitory Effect of EI on PD.

Discussion Conclusion and Implications

Discussion

This study investigates the influence of EI on stress, anxiety, and depression among university students in China, with a particular focus on the mediating role of self-efficacy and the moderating role of ISS. This analysis demonstrated a strong negative relationship between EI and stress, anxiety, and depression for this student group. Consistent with previous research, these results support the notion that EI serves as a critical protective factor against psychological problems, which, in turn, could influence academic performance (Dong et al., 2024; Thomas et al., 2023). In this regard, EI has been seen as vital for emotional regulation and resilience, as Goleman (1995) and Salovey and Mayer (1990) have made clear. Shi et al. (2022) also show that emotionally intelligent Chinese students experience less anxiety, even when very stressed. In terms of information behaviour, the findings also suggest that emotional intelligence can help individuals to manage emotions as well as interpret and react to emotionally complex information they are exposed to in digital and academic settings. The study also found that EI positively predicted higher information utilisation self-efficacy, which, in turn, was associated with lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression. Self-efficacy is understood as information utilisation self-efficacy, the confidence of people in their skills to search and evaluate and use information in digital and academic settings (Tang et al., 2022). The self-efficacy theory in the works of Bandura (1997) states that those who have a stronger belief in the ability to use information can better utilise complex information, make informed decisions, and adjust well to difficult circumstances. The findings indicate that when Chinese students can control their emotions, comprehend others and regulate stress, they are more confident in their ability to overcome obstacles and achieve success. This corresponds to what Sun and Lyu (2022) found, where EI increases self-efficacy in students who experience emotional challenges. Furthermore, Karani and Desai (2024) showed that students with higher EI levels have more self-efficacy, which serves as a psychological cushion, reducing the vulnerability to feelings of distress. These findings indicate that adaptive behavioural resilience depends not only on internal cognitive beliefs but also on individuals' capability to transform information into actionable knowledge within digital academic environments. The current results add to the work of Yuan et al. (2025) in finding that information utilisation self-efficacy partially mediated negative body image and depression in Chinese students. These findings further suggest that emotionally intelligent students engage more effectively with digital information environments, enabling more adaptive interpretation, evaluation, and utilisation of academic knowledge resources.

Although the interaction between EI and ISS was statistically significant, suggesting that information support systems strengthen the protective role of emotional intelligence, the moderation was modest. Information support systems in this research are conceptualized as information support systems that include availability and quality of information resources as well as digital platforms and knowledge-sharing networks (Yen, 2022). While the combined effect was clear for overall psychological distress, its specific moderating impact on stress and depression may be weaker. This may be attributed to cultural factors that limit the effectiveness of support systems among Chinese students. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of information support systems in promoting adaptive outcomes may vary across cultural and contextual settings. This aligns somewhat with the findings in Hoffmire et al. (2024) that information support systems did not straightforwardly improve the protective effects of EI. Despite the commonness of its stress-buffering effects foregrounded in social support theories across different populations (Chen and Kühner, 2025), the moderating effects may vary depending on cultural or contextual factors. Cultural norms that encourage stoicism and the suppression of emotions (Cruz, 2025; Zhang and Chen, 2025) often lead Chinese students in Chinese academic settings to underutilize support systems. Although information support systems facilitate access to knowledge resources, their effectiveness may be constrained by cultural norms that discourage help-seeking behaviours.

Furthermore, information support systems had minimal effect on stress and depression, which diverges from the results by Liu et al. (2023) that information support systems decreases depression in stressful academic contexts. The competitive nature of this environment could discourage students from actively accessing and utilising available information resources, thereby limiting the effectiveness of

information support systems. Without attempts to promote openness and lessen the stigma of asking for help, support systems are ill-equipped to buffer these ills with assistance. This suggests that the mere availability of support is insufficient; rather, the accessibility, usability, and perceived relevance of information resources determine their effectiveness in reducing psychological distress.

Theoretical Implications

First of all, the study creates a unified framework that builds on the development of the traditional psychological theories by placing them within the context of library and information science. In particular, the model integrates Self-Efficacy Theory and Social Support Theory in terms of emotional intelligence. This integration does not relate to traditional explanations of emotional intelligence because it emphasizes the interaction of internal cognitive abilities and external information environments in terms of behavioural and psychological consequences. The study further contributes to information behaviour theory by demonstrating how emotional intelligence shapes individuals' interaction with digital knowledge resources and influences adaptive behavioural responses within information-intensive academic environments.

The results also add to the theory by placing the role of information utilisation self-efficacy as an essential process between emotional intelligence and diminished psychological distress. Although the self-efficacy theory proposed by Bandura focuses on a belief in the capabilities of individuals, this research expands the theory by showing that the beliefs are strongly related to the perceived capabilities of individuals to interact and use information in complex academic settings. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence increases the ability of individuals in interpreting and processing information and hence boosts their confidence in utilizing information in decision making and problem solving. This reconceptualization shifts the emphasis on the general coping beliefs toward the information-based competence, thus, enhancing the current theories of student well-being and adaptive behaviour.

Third, the research contributes to the Social Support Theory by redefining social support in terms of information support systems instead of focusing on emotional or interpersonal support. The results show that the success of support is not only related to its availability but also to its accessibility, reliability, and usability of information on social and institutional levels. In this regard, support systems are informational infrastructures, which facilitate or limit the capacity of individuals to access knowledge resources. The small moderating role in the present study implies that cultural and contextual variables might have an impact on the way people obtain and use the information available. The study provides a subtle insight into the adaptive response contingent on the information environment by placing information support systems in an information behaviour context, thus moderating psychological theory and library and information science.

Practical Implications

The results of this research support the significance of introducing emotional intelligence (EI) training modules in universities counselling and education. As EI has a great influence on stress, anxiety, and depression, emotional regulation, emotional awareness, and interpersonal sensitivity should remain as a priority of the universities to improve the mental health of students. Organized programs like counselling services, mentorship programs and emotional literacy workshops will enable students to cope better with psychological distress in the academic setting.

The mediating effect of self-efficacy as defined in this paper as information utilisation self-efficacy implies that the student support programs must not be limited to the general coping strategies but rather emphasize on enhancing student confidence in the effectiveness of information utilization. Universities ought to offer specific interventions to include research skills training, digital literacy training, and facilitated academic support sessions that assist students to attain the capacity to search, evaluate, and utilize information in addressing academic and personal issues. Perceived capability in the use of information can be increased to enhance the decision making process and lessen the susceptibility to stress and anxiety.

Moreover, although information support systems continue to be a significant factor regarding the well-being of students. Moreover, this research conceptualises social support as information support systems that facilitate access to reliable and relevant knowledge resources. Universities must make sure that the support mechanisms are equipped with the availability, reliability, and usability of the information resources via digital mediums, institutional portals

and peer knowledge-sharing networks. Where the help-seeking behavior might be culturally limited, institutions can offer low-barrier and anonymous access to information, including digitally mediated advisory and knowledge-support services, digital counselling services, and online discussion forums. University libraries and digital academic support services should play a more active role in improving students' information utilisation competencies through information literacy programs and digitally mediated knowledge-support initiatives

This will make sure that the support systems work positively since the students will be able to access and use the appropriate information without necessarily having to depend on direct emotional disclosure.

Conclusion and Future Research

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of EI in the alleviation of psychological distress among Chinese university students in terms of stress, anxiety and depression. Additionally, it examined the mediating effect of self-efficacy and the moderating effect of information support systems. The findings demonstrate that EI is a key protective factor of student mental health, in that it directly serves to protect against psychological distress and indirectly enhances information utilisation self-efficacy. The findings substantiate extant models of emotional functioning that emotional regulation and coping beliefs are central to psychological well-being, but also underline the influence of the confidence of individuals on the ability to effectively use information in the development of adaptive responses. Moreover, the results indicate that adaptive outcomes of students' adaptive behavioural and psychological outcomes depend not only on emotional intelligence but also on their capability to access, evaluate, and utilise information effectively within digital academic environments. Although ISS demonstrated a significant moderating effect, its impact was relatively modest compared to the strong direct effects of emotional intelligence. This implies that whereas information support systems can strengthen the protective value of EI, its impact might rely on the capacity of students to obtain and use the necessary information that has been furnished by social and institutional support systems. In high-pressure academic environments, particularly those where mental health stigma persists, culture-based psychological strategies are vital. Tailoring interventions to match cultural expectations and reduce stigma could improve the effectiveness of both emotional competencies and information support systems in alleviating psychological distress. This highlights the need to address the issue of student well-being in digital academic settings by taking into account information-related capabilities and support systems and psychological aspects.

Future Research

To begin with, the inclusion of additional psychological factors such as mindfulness and resilience may help explain more thoroughly the mediating role of EI in alleviating psychological distress. Furthermore, a longitudinal design would be beneficial in tracking changes in students' EIs, self-efficacy, particularly in terms of information utilisation capability. Moreover, considering the limited information support systems moderating role reported in this study, further research should investigate more deeply what conditions information support can be useful in accessing and utilizing pertinent knowledge. Alternatively, a second-order conceptualization of information support systems (emotional support, informational support, and instrumental support) can be used to differentiate the contribution of each factor to mental health outcomes and add to structural validity. The role of information behaviour constructs, including information utilisation self-efficacy and information support systems, in various educational and cultural settings may also be a topic of future study to gain a better insight into how digital information environments can influence psychological and behavioural outcomes.

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Authors has no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study'.

Funding Declaration

There is no funding.

Informed Consent: Participants were informed about the aim of the study, confidentiality of information, voluntary participation, and ability to opt out of the study if needed. Informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants prior to participation. "Do you accept participation in this survey". If they chose to "I accept to participate", they could proceed the next page of the measures. All participants gave their agreement to participate in the study and consented to processing of their data.

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