

**A Phenomenological Research Study into Student Perceptions  
of the  
Online Tutor's Emotional Intelligence**

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A Thesis Submitted to the University of Huddersfield

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2025

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## Abstract

This research study explores students' perceptions of the impact of an emotionally intelligent tutor in online teaching and learning. Conducted at a university in northern England, it employs a unique qualitative synergistic phenomenological approach with semi-structured interviews for data collection. Analysis revealed the significance of tutor EI for female online students, identifying four key themes: emotionally intelligent tutors provide encouragement and support, foster interpersonal relationships, remain approachable despite remote access, and demonstrate concern for the students' welfare. Participants reported that their emotionally intelligent tutor positively influenced their academic engagement and outcomes. The findings underscore the need for reflective, EI-informed pedagogic tutor practices to enhance student engagement in virtual classrooms. The study recommends incorporating EI training into higher education tutor professional development programs and institutional support for ongoing improvements in tutor EI, particularly in online teaching. It also discusses the study's implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

**Keywords:** *Ability Emotional Intelligence, Online Education, Synergistic Phenomenological Approach*

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## Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations Used in this Thesis

CoP/ PVCoP	Communities of practice/ Potential virtual communities of practice
EC	Emotional competencies
ECI	Emotional competence inventory
EI	Emotional intelligence
ESCI	Emotional social competence inventory
EQI	Emotional quotient inventory
HE/ HEI	Higher education/ Higher education institution
HIP	Hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology
IQ	Intelligence quota
MSCEIT	Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test
OEA	Others emotional appraisal
ORE	Others regulation of emotions
SEA	Self-emotional appraisal
SPA	Synergistic phenomenological approach
SRE	Self-regulation of emotions
TEIQue	Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire
VLE	Virtual learning environment

## Online Instruction

The student and tutor are physically displaced from each other, with no in-person communication, and they are conjoined using the Internet and a suitable platform to interface.

## Participants

The participants in this thesis are referred to interchangeably as participants or students. The participants were all female university students taught by a tutor in online virtual learning environments in 2021.

## Synchronous Learning

The tutor and student are both present simultaneously online and can speak and listen in real-time.

## Tutor

Throughout this research study, the term tutor represents academic staff members who work in higher educational institutions, delivering teaching and learning to students. Tutor has also been used to designate the female HE teacher/ lecturer referenced in this research.



## **Glossary of Phenomenological Terms Used in this Thesis**

The phenomenological terms used in this thesis are capitalised and written in *italics* to show that they incorporate specific ideas or meanings. The Husserlian terminology translations are based on original German translations from The Husserlian Dictionary (Moran & Cohen, 2012). The Heideggerian terminology used in this thesis uses translations based on the original German translation, sourced from The Heidegger Dictionary (Dahlstrom, 2023) and The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon (Wrathall, 2021).

### *Bracketing*

The researcher casts aside all self-meaning and self-knowledge so that those meanings become distanced and valued differently; this is done to be receptive to the phenomenon from the participants' viewpoints. It is a precursor to the *Reduction*.

### *Da-sein*

A way of being and existing in one's world that discloses things that may otherwise not be seen. It is the way an individual is in their world.

### *Discourse*

The process of speaking and listening to others and the self, through which existence is disclosed, enables *Da-sein* to be understood.

### *Epoché*

The suspension of belief by the researcher of that which is already known to them, and which precedes the *Phenomenological Reduction*.

*Essence*

The very heart of the phenomenon, *Da-sein's Essence*, is the heart of its existence, and it is what endures when everything else has been stripped away from a phenomenon.

*Fore-knowledge*

The researcher's prior knowledge.

*Geworfenheit*

*Thrownness*, or being in the world, the time and place in which one lives out one's life, is the beginning of *Da-sein*.

*Hermeneutical Circle*

The circle of understanding is where the researcher moves backwards and forwards between fore-knowledge and the new knowledge revealed by the researcher, fusing the two.

*Intentionality*

Thinking about anything becomes thinking with intent about something, and we become connected to the *Things* through *Intentionality*.

*Lebenswelt/ In der Welt Sein*

The participants' lifeworld is inseparable; it is where they experience the phenomenon.

*Natural Attitude*

The natural, ordinary, everyday way an individual lives in their world.

### *Reduction*

In the *Reduction*, the researcher becomes changed. Their preconceived knowledge is replaced by empathy and a desire to understand the participants' experiences.

### *Sein*

*Sein* or Being is how individuals exist in their worlds.

### *Things*

The phenomena, which can be real or imaginary, with which the research is concerned.

### *Warheit*

The truth of the phenomena as the participants reveal it.

### *Vergessenheit*

A dismissive forgottenness (forgetfulness) is when one takes the *Things* already within one's consciousness for granted. It is a forgottenness of being and a taken-for-grantedness of the *Things*.

### *Zu dem Sachen Selbst*

The call to phenomenologists to attend to the "*Things* (phenomena) themselves" and consider the core to reveal the *Essence*.

## Acknowledgements

This endeavour would not have been possible without the help of many university colleagues, family members and friends.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Andy Youde and Dr Kate Lavender, for their guidance and support through what proved to be four years of, at times, an uphill struggle. Thank you, Andy, for believing I could do this and rescuing me on that cold December day when I thought I would leave university without completing my studies.

Thank you to my frank research participants. Without you, this research would not have been possible, and your voices would never have been heard.

To my family, I owe a lifelong debt of gratitude. To my son Jay, whom I know cannot remember when mum was not a student, I promise it is over now! To my partner Alec, who sacrificed much to allow me the time to find myself at university and believed I could become a doctor and can now retire himself. To my mum, who has waited patiently for this thing to be done, it is finished! Thank you all.

To all my friends who allowed me to be consumed by my PhD baby and patiently supported me from the wings, Joan, Francine, and Becky, thank you for your love and support. From now on, I will try to be a much better and more available friend.

Finally, thanks go to my university friends and fellow PGR 'Huddlers.' This thesis would not have been finished without your constant support and encouragement during all our online sessions together.

# **1. Chapter One: A Phenomenological Research Study into Student Perceptions of the Online Tutor's Emotional Intelligence**

## **1.1. Introduction**

This chapter introduces the research topic and outlines how the study will contribute to exploring a previously unexamined phenomenon within the realm of emotional intelligence. It begins by providing the context for the research, followed by a detailed rationale. The problem statement is then presented, followed by an explanation of the novel methodological approach employed to address and frame the research questions. The study's intended contributions to knowledge are outlined and the chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the study, before closing with a final summary.

## **1.2. The Context of the Research**

Globally, higher education institutions (HEI) offered face-to-face, blended, and online virtual learning environment (VLE) instruction before the SARS-COV-2 (hereafter COVID-19) pandemic. However, the pandemic pushed most such institutions into online learning (Jili et al., 2021). In England, due to the pandemic, the Corona Virus Restrictions (Hancock, 2020) came into force, necessitating limited face-to-face social contact. The repercussion of limiting face-to-face contact severely restricted the face-to-face instruction (Hancock, 2020) that universities and HEI settings could offer their students (Arghode et al., 2022). To ensure that there was a continuity of teaching, institutions had to opt for online or virtual methods of instruction (D'Souza et al., 2023; Day et al., 2021). Consequently, HEIs changed their lesson delivery to incorporate only online sessions and offered unparalleled levels of online tutoring (Răducu & Stănculescu, 2021). Simultaneously, tutors were required to comprehend and become more aware of their students' emotional responses due to the move to online

education (Arghode et al., 2022) and the lack of access to peer groups, social networks and contact with others.

Now that the pandemic has receded, those requirements are still as valid for many tutors as they were during the pandemic. Although there have been moves to place instruction back onto a face-to-face model, many institutions now routinely offer online courses (Quezada et al., 2020; UCAS, 2024; Williams & Donlan, 2023). Numerous institutions target virtual students and prioritise flexible study methods in ways unimaginable before the pandemic, with over 1100 online courses currently advertised by 127 providers on the United Kingdom UCAS (2024) Website. Numerous institutions are targeting virtual students and prioritising flexible study methods in ways unimaginable before the pandemic, with over 1100 online courses currently advertised by 127 providers on the United Kingdom UCAS (2024) website. HEIs have been found to have invested heavily in the technology and staff required for online instruction (Walker & Voce, 2023), while simultaneously, the global population has become more accustomed to being online. Combine this with the new English legislation around student visas (The Home Office, 2024), which may further discourage international students from attending in person. The result may be that online tutoring to an increasingly global audience is a distinct possibility for many English HE tutors. This move to online work could be mirrored elsewhere, so the findings from this study may potentially have a global impact. Thus, there is a greater than ever need to understand the requirements of university students regarding online instruction and how to help tutors facilitate student engagement and subsequent academic achievement by using their emotional intelligence abilities.

Tutors working in remote access VLEs play a vital role in delivering education to online students. VLE tutors are responsible for creating engaging and interactive learning

experiences for their students, often using digital tools and technologies. They must be skilled at adapting their teaching methods to suit the online learning environment and be able to provide effective feedback and support to their students. In addition, they must be knowledgeable about the subject matter they are teaching and able to communicate complex ideas clearly and concisely. With the growing demand for online education, the role of VLE tutors is becoming increasingly important in ensuring that students have access to quality learning experiences, regardless of their location or circumstances. The desirable VLE tutor attributes are further justified in Chapter Two (see sections 2.8.1-2.8.4).

This section has introduced the background to the sudden increase in VLE-facilitated education. The following section indicates the role that the concept of emotional intelligence has in online instruction.

### **1.3. The Rationale**

The concept of emotional intelligence has captivated the curiosity of the global general population, academics, and educationalists. Emotional intelligence (EI) conceptualisations are a diverse, occasionally engaging, sometimes at-odds corpus of work, which are both seductive and contentious (Elfenbein & MacCann, 2017). The ongoing debate has continued for over 30 years about whether EI exists and if it does so as a separate strand of intelligence or if it is simply another term for aspects of a person's intelligence. Regarding educators, Youde (2020) has also questioned whether EI is merely an attribute of effective teaching practice that all good teachers command. The core of the debate about EI is the different abilities or skills and how they can be assembled logically into the whole so they can be understood and assessed (Elfenbein & MacCann, 2017). This thesis does not aim to introduce a new theory of EI but to serve as a bridge connecting current EI theories. Its purpose is to enhance understanding and broaden the scope of the existing concepts. The

conceptualisation of EI is discussed in detail in Chapter Two, Part One of the Literature review. The chapter justifies Mayer and Salovey's (1997) cognitive ability EI used in this research study. The Mayer and Salovey (1997) definition operationalised for this research study used the following four constituents: emotional perception, emotional facilitation, emotional understanding, and emotional regulation to encompass the appropriate tutor EI abilities investigated by this study.

Prior research into EI from an educational standpoint has indicated the helpfulness of being emotionally intelligent for HE educators to aid in improving their effective tutor practices (Ali et al., 2017). At the same time, Youde's (2020) work pointed out the added desirability of having EI tutors in the virtual learning environment (VLE) for the tutors themselves, their students, and their institutions. The impact of EI on tutor skills and abilities has also been investigated, and the links have been well-documented (see for example Ali et al., 2017; Arghode et al., 2022; Kaur et al., 2019; Khassawneh et al., 2022).

This research study acknowledges all the prior research that has indicated the fundamental role of the tutor's EI. Nonetheless, the essential role of this research is not to prove that emotional intelligence or tutor emotional intelligence exists; it presupposes that existence by virtue of all the preceding studies. The previous debates have delivered multiple ways the notion of EI may be understood, and there is a consensus that EI characteristics are desirable for effective teaching. However, this research study seeks the views of the student participants and asks them to describe their experiences and perceptions of the impact of their tutor's EI on themselves. This research will assist in understanding the gaps in current knowledge to build on the prior research's limitations and to use a unique methodological approach in a particular context to build greater awareness of the phenomenon. Before commencing this study, academic literature that considered the students' views of the impact



of having an emotionally intelligent tutor in a VLE could not be located. Thus, having identified a gap in current knowledge the research topic in this study is the consideration of the students' experiences of their online tutor's emotional intelligence and its impact on them and their academic outcomes.

This section has highlighted the emotionally intelligent tutors' role in VLEs and indicated the lack of understanding of student views. The following section explores the problem statement concerning this knowledge gap.

#### **1.4. The Statement of the Problem**

The problem central to the argument of this thesis concerns the under-researched students' lived experiences of being tutored online by an emotionally intelligent tutor. The move to place classes online has resulted in more tutors needing to understand their online students' needs. This research study will conduct a novel synergistic phenomenological approach to understanding student perceptions of online tutors' emotional intelligence and its effect on themselves and their academic outcomes and the following section discusses how the framework was implemented in this study.

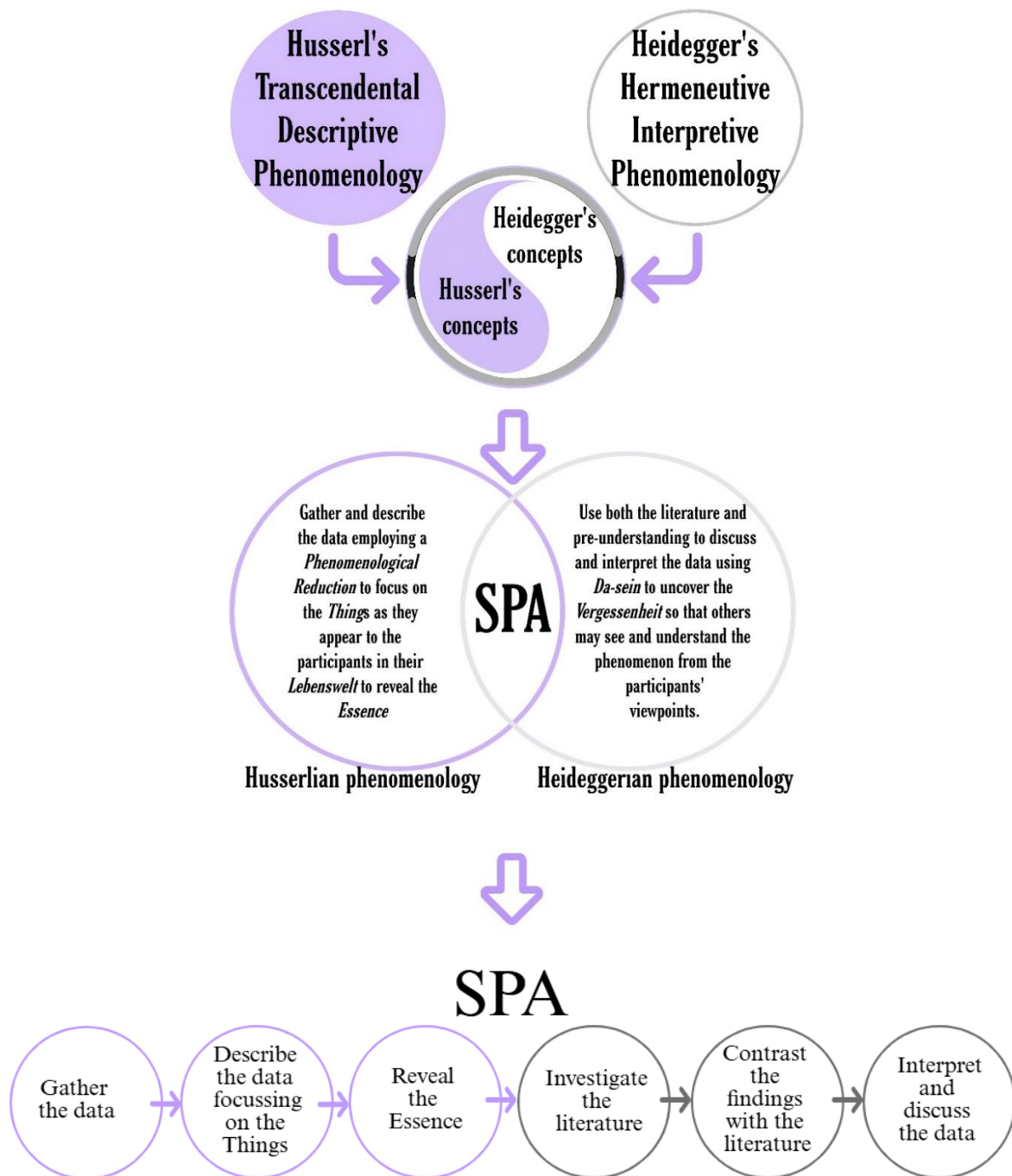
#### **1.5. The Synergistic Phenomenological Approach**

This study was influenced by Alhazmi and Kaufman's (2022) blended hybrid phenomenological approach, particularly their responsive integration of descriptive (Husserlian transcendental) and interpretive (Heideggerian hermeneutic) phenomenology used in their blended hybrid approach to phenomenological research. Alhazmi and Kaufman's study brought together various aspects of descriptive and interpretive phenomenology as they aimed to promote a phenomenological approach that engaged responsively and overlapped the two methodologies. Their work inspired the researcher to take a more flexible approach rather than rigidly adhering to one tradition. The value of such

an approach is that it acknowledges both the descriptive lived experiences of the participants and the interpretive meaning-making process. While Alhazmi and Kaufman provided a foundation for methodological integration, this study extends their approach by delineating the particular aspects of phenomenological approaches that were used in this study.

The harmonised methodology in this study paid equal respect to Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology (see Chapter Three). The researcher considered that utilising one of either branches of phenomenology would not give a complete picture of the complexities of student experiences of being taught by an emotionally intelligent tutor within a VLE or adequately capture the participants' meaning-making of the phenomenon alone. The methodology was designated as a synergistic phenomenological approach (SPA). The SPA was developed during this research study to incorporate Husserlian and Heideggerian traditions to deliver a rich contextualised understanding by describing and interpreting the student participants' experiences. The SPA formed a conceptual framework that ordered the study's unique route and impacted the data collection, description, analysis, interpretation, and discussion. The SPA has been diagrammed and is presented below as Instructional Diagram 1.

Instructional Diagram 1: The SPA conceptual framework



This study exemplifies how others may enact this SPA methodological framework incorporating the distinct aspects of the two phenomenological schools and the order of the steps needed to accomplish a SPA to research. Van Manen (2020, p. 487) described phenomenology as being “highly innovative in its immanent purpose while remaining committed to the search for origiary meaning” and he has listed the significant contributors to

the phenomenological research tradition. He demonstrated how they have reorientated the fundamental methodology of the approach. These changes in approach indicate the flexibility of phenomenology and its ability to be repurposed to enable the diligent researcher to craft a design that allows a phenomenon to be better understood. The utilisation of the SPA continues the previously established flexible approach to phenomenology and adds another third way to approach phenomenologically grounded research.

The decision to follow a SPA affected the route the thesis took as the data generation and description were completed before the researcher engaged with the literature. The researcher deliberately postponed engaging with literature related to the characteristics of an emotionally intelligent tutor until the later stages of the study. This decision was made to uphold Husserl's concept of Phenomenological Reduction (Husserl, 2012a), ensuring that pre-existing biases were suspended (Spinelli, 2005). By refraining from examining such literature before the data collection and analysis, the process of the Reduction was facilitated. Reduction involves a systematic exploration of the relationship between the Lebenswelt (lifeworld) (Husserl, 1970) and reality (Zahavi, 2003). Through this process, the researcher could discern the Essence (Husserl, 2012a) of the phenomenon as articulated by the participants.

However, the researcher remained mindful of capturing the *Essence* through the participants' perspectives, recognising that the *Essence* is not a fixed entity but rather a reflection of the researcher's descriptive understanding at the time of analysis (Moustakas, 1994). In phenomenology, *Essences* are understood as "a structure of essential meanings" (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 12). They represent the core of the phenomenon, pre-existing independently of the researcher, who reveals them through intentional engagement with the phenomenon.

In alignment with the Heideggerian hermeneutic principles (1996) also adopted in this study, the literature review was finalised only after data collection and description (Hamill, 2010). To maintain objectivity, the researcher employed *Bracketing* (Husserl, 1970), consciously setting aside personal student experiences. The researcher engaged with the literature only at a preliminary level and focussed on aspects such as the measurement scale used to assess the tutor's EI and the gap in knowledge around the intended phenomenon. The second part of the literature review, found in Chapter 5, delves into the qualities and abilities that an emotionally intelligent tutor could possess. Postponing the literature review allowed the researcher's descriptions in Chapter Four to remain unaffected by pre-existing literature on EI.

Hermeneutic research inevitably acknowledges the evolving relationship between literature and the researcher, as it challenges and reshapes the researcher's thinking (Dibley et al., 2020). Phenomenological research, therefore, emphasises the interaction between the world and the reflective mind, considering these as two interconnected halves of the phenomenon (Zahavi, 2020). Through the lens of lived experiences, humans derive meaning from their worlds (Husserl, 2012a), and it is this process of meaning-making that phenomenological research seeks to uncover. The Heideggerian approach incorporated into the SPA enabled an interpretation of the data and this was enacted in Chapter Six and incorporated the discussion of the findings using the literature in Chapter Five to illuminate the findings. The researcher's *Fore-knowledge* and understanding (Dibley et al., 2020) therefore, became integral to the data interpretation and discussion process which were enriched by attending to the literature.

This section has referenced the two phenomenological schools of thought (Husserlian transcendental and Heideggerian hermeneutic), which have been used in fusion (Aguiar,

2022). This harmonised approach fuses aspects of both transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology and has been adopted to navigate the complexities of understanding the phenomenon through the participants' eyes and embraces the same principled approach as that of Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) in their hybrid phenomenological method. Notwithstanding the philosophical stance adopted in this thesis, it is a unique approach discussed further in the Methodology Chapter Three.

This section has presented the holistic framework developed to understand the online student experiences. This study now presents the research questions devised using the SPA lens to answer the problem statement.

### **1.6. The Research Questions**

To aspire to a phenomenological understanding of student experiences, the following primary and secondary questions were devised to frame the research:

- How do students recognise and experience the tutor's emotional intelligence in synchronous online learning contexts?
- How do students recognise and value the tutor's emotional intelligence levels in synchronous online learning contexts?

Phenomenological studies enquire about the experience of a phenomenon, so the research questions' focus should be on the participant's experiences and be limited in their number to highlight their focus of attention (van Manen, 2016a). In general, a dearth of research has regarded student perspectives of their tutor's EI from either face-to-face or online experiences. This thesis reports on the qualitative findings of a small-scale research study investigating student perceptions of having an emotionally intelligent tutor and the tutor's impact on synchronous online learning. The findings include the added perspective of a female viewpoint (see sections 3.15, 5.3.8, and 6.2.9) however the all-female sample was

accidentally achieved and not part of the research design. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to note that all the actors in the study identify as female and so there is a female bias to the results.

In the year 2020/ 2021, 57% of UK (United Kingdom) students identified as being female (HESA, 2022) (contrasted with a national female population of 51% (Office for National Statistics, 2023)). Thus, female students were in the majority of the university population, so studying and considering female students' views is pertinent.

Phenomenological research considers subjectivity, which should not be viewed separately from the context of the world that situates the actors (Zahavi, 2011). This research study acknowledges its accidental female gaze and the fact that cultural norms and ways of being affect subjectivity. Therefore, this study focuses on the complex interaction between the female participants and the phenomenon (Zeiler, 2020) or *Things* (Husserl, 2013b, p. 168).

This section has identified the importance of understanding the student's online learning experience with an emotionally intelligent tutor. The following section expands on this to determine the research study's contributions to knowledge.

### **1.7. This Study's Contributions to Knowledge**

This study uses a novel SPA to gain an in-depth understanding of the students' perspectives of their tutor's EI from the viewpoint of their instruction in the VLE. Previous research has indicated the importance and need for tutors to be emotionally intelligent and to engage in practices to increase their EI (Kaur et al., 2019). Research has continued to stress the importance of tutor EI; for example, Maamari and Salloum's (2023) interesting findings about the profound impact of tutor EI on students and their subsequent academic success. Nonetheless, scant research has considered the students' views of such tutors or focused mainly on the impact on students of emotionally intelligent tutors in VLEs.

The originality of this study is in its argument that tutoring in a VLE demands an extra distinct set of abilities than those required for face-to-face instruction. This study further argues that those abilities draw on the tutor's EI. With the increased demand for VLE instruction following the COVID-19 pandemic, more tutors than ever are working in online instruction. Thus, those tutors could benefit from emotionally intelligent capabilities to improve their online practice. This research addresses the lack of understanding about the impact of emotionally intelligent tutors on their students in a VLE.

The social aspect of the tutor-student interaction is readily visible; tutors and their students must interact to enable learning in both face-to-face instruction and synchronous VLEs (Dallman, 2022). Notwithstanding, the emotional element of this social-emotional interaction is less apparent (Allen et al., 2014). EI has been linked to success in face-to-face teaching environments (Giordano, 2021), yet less is known about the impact of emotionally intelligent tutors engaged in online instruction. Within the VLE, this thesis argues that tutor EI may prove to be the link that further facilitates the dynamic of social interactions, as the remote delivery of the synchronous lesson can hamper student engagement. A lack of engagement may lead to less optimal learning. Jang et al. (2010) found student engagement to be crucial for students' academic success in face-to-face settings; it follows that this may be applicable in online classes. This research study considers whether tutor EI could potentially bridge the difficulties that arise from the remote delivery method.

This study also considers whether the tutor used her EI to engage and motivate students to grasp the topic of study as readily as if the lesson were delivered face to face. The dynamics of social and emotional responses are essential to tutoring, without which learning cannot happen (Kyriakides et al., 2013). This study explores if this could be even more important in the remote delivery of the VLE. Minbashian et al.'s (2018) organisational



research found that EI may positively impact work conscientiousness and workplace personality. This study also considers whether this is significant for tutors working in synchronous VLEs, where they are consistently required to manage their social and emotional responses whilst delivering remote lessons.

This section has highlighted the unique contributions to knowledge this research study argues as it explores the phenomenon using the SPA to uncover the students' experiences. In the following section, each chapter is briefly described, and the unique structure of the SPA is illuminated.

### **1.8. The Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is presented similarly to the standard thesis chapter layout and convention of literature review, followed by methodology, data presentation, and analysis. However, Part Two of the Literature Review (Chapter Five) is placed before the discussion in Chapter Six. This research study constructed a SPA that involved harmonious aspects of Husserlian descriptive and Heideggerian interpretive methods to deliver and interpret meaningful data. The literature review was completed after the data analysis to preserve the participants' voices and was used to illuminate the discussion in Chapter Six. This novel thesis presentation reflected the researcher's journey of understanding and demonstrates how the approach was developed.

Chapter Two, the Literature Review, presents the first half of the literature review, a background enquiry into EI and its historical timeline. It considers different classifications of EI and justifies the one chosen. It then examines the abilities encompassed by EI that tutors could possess and their extra significance when applied to working in a VLE.

Chapter Three, the Methodology, is in two parts; the first presents the theoretical underpinning of the research and justifies the use of a harmonised phenomenology based on a

synergistic use of Husserlian and Heideggerian traditions. It discusses the ontology and epistemology used in this thesis before exploring the specific role and positionality of the researcher. The second part of the chapter is devoted to the research design. This section discusses the ethical concerns, practical aspects of recruitment to the sample, and the chosen data collection method. A detailed summary of the data analysis methods used follows this. The chapter closes with a discussion on the researcher's reflective journaling used to document the decisions taken during the research.

Chapter four focuses on the Husserlian aspect of the SPA and is the data presentation and description chapter. It covers the superordinate and subordinate themes as discovered in the data analysis. It explores how the students experienced their tutor's EI and examines the impact of the tutor's EI on themselves and their final module grades. The careful use of the participants' voices documents how they engaged with their meaning-making of the phenomenon.

Chapter Five presents the second half of the literature review, which is placed at this point in the study to illuminate the discussion around the findings. The research questions are presented here as a reminder, along with a discussion that identifies the gap in current knowledge around student perceptions of their online tutor's EI. The chapter introduces abilities that emotionally intelligent tutors working in VLEs might possess to contrast these with the discussion in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six includes the discussion where Chapter Four's findings are contrasted with Chapter Five's literature review. The discussion illuminates how the findings contribute to the field of research into tutor EI.

Finally, the thesis concludes with Chapter Seven, which contains the conclusions and recommendations of the study. It indicates the significance of the findings to tutors and their

employees before acknowledging the limitations and making recommendations for further research.

### **1.9. Summary of Chapter One**

Chapter One has demonstrated the gap in current knowledge that the research study has identified and wishes to explore further. Much previous research has investigated students in VLEs, tutors working in VLEs, tutor EI and its potential impact on tutor practice and subsequent student involvement and attainment. All too frequently, calls have been made for more research to develop a nuanced understanding of tutor emotional intelligence and its impact on students. Nevertheless, no research has coalesced the students' views of emotionally intelligent VLE tutors. No research could be identified into female student views of tutor EI, which considered the VLE's impact or incorporated a phenomenological methodology to increase the understanding of those student views. Hence, this study has a unique role in increasing knowledge and understanding through its findings about the research topic and its unique phenomenology based on a harmonious synthesis of the two founding approaches to phenomenological research.

This research study moves to Chapter Two (Part One) of the Literature Review, which thoroughly explores the historical timeline of the concept and associated studies of EI and its relevance to this research study.

## **2. Chapter Two: Part One of The Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This thesis followed first Husserlian and then Heideggerian phenomenological principles in a unique Synergistic Phenomenological Approach (SPA). Therefore, the conventional literature review presented here as Chapter Two, Part One, is placed here to develop the discussion around the conceptualisation of emotional intelligence (EI). This section of the literature review opens by presenting a brief historical timeline of the development of the concept of EI as the background to the research and its significance to the study.

This first part of the literature review begins by introducing the research topic and discussing how this research can contribute to a previously unexplored phenomenon within the concept of emotional intelligence. It commences with a brief introduction to the subject and focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of EI. It then discusses the background to the concept's early days and follows the timeline, highlighting the significant developments through to the present day. In this way, the complexities surrounding the concept will be elucidated. It continues with a discourse on the various approaches to and the different measures of EI before justifying the measure used to assess the tutor's EI. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion on the working definition of EI used in this thesis and on the essential tutor attributes of EI considered by the participants. Part two of the literature review can be located in Chapter Five, which reviews the literature that considers the attributes an emotionally intelligent tutor could possess.

The following section explores the concept's historical timeline and considers some relevant associated EI studies.

## **2.2. Part One of the Literature Review: Emotional Intelligence**

This thesis contributes towards further conceptualising EI. This research acknowledges the importance and significance of EI, particularly the potential impact of having an emotionally intelligent tutor in an online capacity within a virtual learning environment (VLE). EI has been documented and critically discussed at length (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005; Cherniss, 2010). Critics have contested its relevance and existence (Ashkanasy et al., 2002; Conte, 2005; Locke, 2005), leading Spector and Johnson nearly twenty years ago to comment that “There is perhaps no construct in the social sciences that has produced more controversy in recent years than emotional intelligence” (2006, p. 325). However, more recently, the concept’s dissent appears to have publicly decreased, and now there seems to be a broader acceptance of the theoretical concept of EI (O'Connor et al., 2019). As Weike has observed, the construction of a new concept gives free rein to a “disciplined imagination” within a three-step process of “variation, selection, and retention” (1989, p. 519). This process may find itself in varied iterations and entail wide-ranging scholarly debate and rigorous testing as part of the validation process before the universal adoption of the concept. However, the ongoing discussion ultimately refines, agrees upon, and accepts universal definitions (Cherniss, 2010). Regarding the concept of EI, this ongoing process of refinement can be seen to still be in play.

This thesis did not aim to prove the existence of EI but presupposes the existence and acknowledgement of EI through the previous thirty years of research and academic debate. A considerable excess of 70,000 journal articles (Vaida & Opre, 2014) plus thousands of books and online articles written about the attributes and significance testify to the existence of EI. Despite being widespread in non-intellectual circles (for example, Goleman’s 1995 book), the more popular works may not have been academically beneficial as academia requires

empirical data to evaluate. The past extravagant claims about EI have resulted in the “harsh sceptical stance” (Murphy et al., 2006, pp. 350-351) subsequently adopted by academia. Nonetheless, the ongoing research has resulted in the endorsement of the concept by many varied disciplines, such as business (Tucker et al., 2000), management (Langhorn, 2004), healthcare (Nightingale et al., 2018), and education (Petrides et al., 2018). Despite the widespread acceptance, the researcher has identified a significant gap in understanding the relevance of students’ perceptions of an emotionally intelligent tutor and considers the conceptualisation of EI incomplete. This research study uses a unique hermeneutic (Dibley et al., 2020) harmonised SPA that echoes the blended stance of Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) to add to the account of EI. In so doing, it clarifies the significance of tutors’ EI levels and the perception of this significance by the students, highlighting the potential of its subsequent impact on them.

A brief historical overview of the critical areas in developing the theory of EI follows, highlighting the complexities and tensions surrounding EI and demonstrating how the collective epistemology of EI has increased due to continued research. It illuminates the divergencies as the concept developed and indicates that within the field of EI, there remain different nuanced schools of thought. At times in the past, their architects have battled amongst themselves, which those who have doubts about the significance of EI have used to disparage the concept and muddy the waters (Locke, 2005).

### **2.3. A Historical Journey from Intelligence to Emotional Intelligence**

The first attempt to define social intelligence was made by Edward Thorndike (1920). He investigated ways to understand intelligence, tried to discover if people’s careers aligned with their intelligence, and made hypotheses about intelligent children and their possible adult levels of intelligence. Intelligence research was initially conducted at the beginning of

the 20<sup>th</sup> century when it had already been recognised that early intelligence tests revealed it was more complex than a single mental ability (Riggio et al., 2001). While the focus was on traditional intelligence quota (IQ) tests, those early studies highlighted the notion of a “broader conceptualisation of intelligence” (Riggio et al., 2001, pp. 1,2) that was understood to consist of different facets. Thorndike argued that intelligence was not a singular possession but a collection of diverse types of intelligence. Elaborating on his discussion and defining the three types of intelligence he thought the most prominent were mechanical, abstract, and social. He devised different means of assessing an individual’s levels of distinct types of intelligence and highlighted that social intelligence was described as a tool that enabled wise interactions between humans (Thorndike, 1920, p. 228). Following the ravages of the First World War, social intelligence could have been seen as a highly desirable attribute. Thorndike elaborated on his theory by concluding that social intelligence was “thought and action directly concerned with actual things and persons in one’s hands and before one’s aims” (1920, p. 229). After deliberation, Thorndike and Stein (1937) surmised that social intelligence was difficult to quantify and, therefore, difficult to measure accurately. Although, Thorndike and Stein, (1937) further speculated that intelligence was composed of different social abilities focussed on the understanding and management of people.

Nearly thirty years later, in the post-war era, Leeper’s motivational theory of emotion considered emotional thoughts to be components of and linked to a person’s general level of intelligence. Leeper (1948) posited that a healthy emotional process would foster intellectual functioning and skills development. Revisiting and building on this, Plutchik began to organise and categorise emotions, utilising his theory of emotional states, and discussed and linked emotions to traits or abilities (1960, p. 166). This identification of emotional traits and abilities was a significant development towards EI that would become apparent some 20 years later with the work of Salovey and Meyer (1990).

In the early 1980's Gardner enlarged Thorndyke's notion of multiple intelligences (1920). Laying the foundations for Salovey and Mayer's work, with his theoretical assumption that intelligence "included a fuller appreciation of human cognitive capacities (*which*) emerges if we consider spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence (the list as of 1983)" (Gardner, 1983, p. xii). He defined intelligence as the human capacity to enable the awareness of a problem and the capability to problem-solve (Gardner, 2011). Like Thorndyke, Gardner theorised that people do not have just one intellectual capacity but possess distinct types of intelligence. Gardner's work challenged the assumption that just one intelligence overrode other systems within the brain. He proposed an initial set of seven (later eight and more recently a ninth) (Gardner, 2006) primary intelligences that all arose from specific and different systems within the brain (Gardner, 2011). Gardner's work led him to hypothesise that individuals possess distinctive personal combinations of several types of intelligence, which govern how an individual responds to any given scenario. The list of multiple intelligences included:

- Interpersonal intelligence (the ability to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and to be able to collaborate effectively with them) and
- Intrapersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand oneself, to know one's fears, desires, and abilities and to use this information to understand one's emotional response) (Gardner, 1983).

The critics of Gardner, particularly in the psychology sector (Visser et al., 2006; Waterhouse, 2006), dismissed his claim of multiple intelligences, pointing out his lack of empirical evidence to give credence to his theory. Critics still doubt aspects of his theory (Rousseau, 2021). However, educationalists have satisfactorily applied his ideas in the classroom



(Armstrong, 2017) and claim success in personalising curricula based on multiple intelligence theory (Malapad & Quimbo, 2021).

Since Gardner's work on multiple intelligences thirty years ago, many diverse constructs of EI have evolved (Dasborough et al., 2022). The first known academic paper that included the term emotional intelligence was by Payne (1985) in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, which could be said to be the foundation of the theory of EI. Payne's research was based on his theories of using emotions to solve problems and thus develop emotional intelligence. Nevertheless, he did not expand on his theory. Two studies followed this and are generally considered the first academic works on the concept of EI: Mayer et al. (1990) and Salovey and Mayer (1990). The latter is usually considered to be the inception of EI. The two research teams began exploring EI and defining the attributes of an emotionally intelligent person. As this was a new area of research, the concept was constructed bottom up. Naturally, the concept had overlaps and divergencies, which have continued until today (Bucich & MacCann, 2019).

Salovey and Mayer then constructed an outline for EI, launching the onset of 30 years of academic discussion, elaboration, and study (McCleskey, 2014). Mayer et al. (1990, pp. 774-780) measured the ability of subjects to recognise and perceive the emotional content in visual stimuli. They intended to prove that EI was a skill or ability that could be quantified and improved (which will be discussed in the second part of the literature review, Chapter Five). Their early definition of EI was: "Emotional intelligence involves the accurate appraisal and expression of emotions in oneself and others and the regulation of emotion in a way that enhances living" (Mayer et al., 1990, p. 772). Following more research, Salovey and Mayer (1990) began to view EI as a cognitive ability and a multidimensional construct as it included factors such as identifying one's emotions and those of others. Salovey and Mayer's

definition of EI became “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (1990, p. 5). Following their continued research, Mayer and Salovey further refined their definition of EI to be: “a personal ability to accurately and competently process emotional input appertaining to recognising and regulating emotions in others and oneself” (1995, p. 197).

Goleman (1995, 2004) expanded the definition of EI to be separate and interrelated abilities that relate to and can be measured by IQ tests. EI was said to include the ability to perceive both our feelings and those of “others to motivate and manage our relationships and ourselves” (Collins & Cooper, 2014, p. 91). Goleman (1995, 2004) continued the theoretical advancement of emotional intelligence with his Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI). The ECI was the first measure explicitly designed to assess an individual’s EI. Reassessing this and following input from Boyatzis et al. (2000), Goleman and Cherniss (2001) described a range of some twenty competencies that were grouped within four capabilities of EI:

- Two under the heading of recognition: self-awareness, social awareness, and
- Two under the title of regulation: self-management and social relationship management.

Following further research, Goleman defined EI as “the capacity for recognising our feelings and those of others, motivating ourselves, and managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships” (2006, p. 317). Nonetheless, Goleman’s work was not without its critics, who said it was based on “unreasoned and unreasonable claims” (Murphy et al., 2006, p. 301).

Bar-On (1997) combined emotional and social intelligence components and introduced the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQI) to determine EI. The EQI (Bar-On, 1997) included five competencies:

- Emotional self-awareness and self-expression (intrapersonal skills),
- Awareness of social relationships (interpersonal skills),
- Adaptability to manage change,
- Stress management as an emotional regulation competence and
- General mood as an ability to keep oneself motivated.

Bar-On defined EI as a collection of skills and competencies and as an emotional-social intelligence, interweaving how humans effectively “understand and express ourselves understand others and relate to them and cope with daily demands” (Bar-On, 2006, p. 14).

Salovey and Mayor continued their conceptual definition of EI. They classified it as a distinct intelligence and defined it as the brain’s ability to process emotional information and “recognise and regulate emotions in ourselves and others” (Beukes, 2010, p. 53). EI was then subdivided by Mayer et al. (2000) into strategic and experiential EI, after which Wong and Law (2002, p. 246) concluded that it had four elements: “self-emotional appraisal, others’ emotional assessment, regulation of emotion and use of emotion”. Revisiting the definition of EI, Mayer et al. (2008, p. 111) noted that it was “the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought.” Thus, it can be observed that EI is seen as a uniquely human result of the interaction between intelligence and emotion (Mayer et al., 2004). EI is not easy to quantify objectively, as is apparent from the continuing redefinition of the concept.

Joseph and Newman (2010) observed that research focussed on EI is often hindered by the indistinctness of the construct of EI and that, too frequently, researchers rewrote the definition of EI to further their arguments. They suggested a cascading model where emotional regulation is achieved when perceptions come before understanding. They considered ability-based EI and removed emotion facilitation from the model, citing the lack

of empirical support and similarity to the superior emotional regulation branch. It has been commonly agreed that EI indicates an individual's capacity to use their learned erudition to school their emotional responses to internal and external stimuli (Behnke & Greenan, 2011).

More recently, Vaida and Opre (2014) built on EI theories and highlighted the role played by EI in building emotional competence (EC). Their work contributed to the theories surrounding EI by highlighting that EI maintains EC. To see performance improvements, EI is necessary to have the mental capacity to fuel organised growth and change and to have the ability to enhance an individual's social skill set (Vaida & Opre, 2014).

This section has acknowledged the proliferation of the theory of EI and the difficulties surrounding its description and adoption. It has alluded to the struggles that the authors of the theory have contested as they strove to define its elusive concept. A pluralistic approach considers intelligence, in general, multifaceted and constructed from many aspects of intelligence, and emotional intelligence could be regarded as similarly multifaceted (Bru-Luna et al., 2021). As a result, various EI concepts focusing on multiple aspects or types of intelligence have emerged (Eberz et al., 2020). Alongside these different constructs of EI are the means of assessing or measuring them. This thesis now considers the various current measures available to determine the EI of the tutor whose students participated in this research study.

#### **2.4. Measuring Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence was originally conceptualised as a multidimensional construct (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Since then, various scales and tests have been developed to assess EI (Gutiérrez-Cobo et al., 2016, 2023). However, not all existing measures account for its multidimensional nature. As a result, three main approaches to EI have emerged (Joseph & Newman, 2010; Vaida & Opre, 2014), highlighting inconsistencies between the theoretical

conceptualisation of EI and its measurement. The three main approaches are ability-based, trait-based and mixed models and highlight the different theoretical perspectives in their make-up which are now discussed in detail.

The first approach is based on Salovey and Mayer's (1990) concept and suggests that EI is a cognitive attribute or ability (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2018). Cognitive ability EI has been acknowledged to have been the most academically investigated concept (Prentice et al., 2020) and the most critiqued (Petrides, 2011; Petrides et al., 2007). Cognitive ability EI is the concept most frequently used in research (Bucich & MacCann, 2019) and the most used within education and educational research (Oberst et al., 2009). Thus, it may be considered to have been evaluated more robustly than the other measures. This approach regards EI as a skill set that supports the manifestation and appraisal of emotions (Vaida & Opre, 2014, p. 27) and a type of intelligence that involves a group of thought processes (Mayer & Salovey, 1993, p. 43). Mayer et al. (2008) have contended that EI is a mental ability, not a preference (by which they described trait EI), which EI has often been accused of being. As a trait, EI has been charged with being strongly correlated to personality, with the implication being that it is not a separate branch of intelligence, merely an overlap (Allen et al., 2014).

The ability model considers EI to be a set of specific attributes for recognising how an individual controls their emotional state; it was built upon many years of research in both personality and psychology and, in this way, can be said to be theoretically grounded (Joseph & Newman, 2010). EI abilities are measured using a performance-based measure, in which the answers to emotionally based problems are placed on a scale from better to worse (Gutiérrez-Cobo et al., 2016). The most valid measure, as defined by Maul (2012), is the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) (Mayer, 2002). The EI abilities measured using MSCEIT (Mayer, 2002) include the expression of emotions,

effective emotion regulation, and the use of emotion to self-motivate and self-govern successfully. Legree et al. (2014, p. 173) observed that “its focus on emotion-related knowledge is unique” in their reanalysis of the variance in EI scoring, perhaps because the MSCEIT includes perception and appraisal of one’s feelings, perception and assistance in modulating another’s emotions and advancing emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Maul (2012) has critiqued the MSCEIT due to its consensus scoring. This type of scoring bases the resultant score on what a panel of test takers has previously agreed is the correct response (MacCann et al., 2004). Mayer et al. (2012) responded to Maul’s criticism by stating that a panel of twenty-one field experts generated their expert scores (Mayer et al., 2012; Mayer et al., 2003). Mayer et al. (2012) added that the scoring also includes consensus scores from a comparison with 5,000 test-takers (Mayer et al., 2007). They argued that “consensus is a legitimate means of determining correct answers” (Mayer et al., 2012, p. 405). Mayer et al. (2012) also pointed out that consensus has been previously used in IQ scoring and that, in time, further agreement on EI veridical scores will be likely. MacCann et al. (2012) reinforced Mayer et al.’s response when they pointed out that Maul’s (2012) critique had been harsh and his parameters for validity were idealistic and overly critical. The MSCEIT, as it is ability-based scoring, is considered the most complex test to fake as it asks participants to solve puzzles and decide on emotions linked to photographs. The results are based on the test taker’s perception understanding, not on the answers they may perceive to be correct (O’Connor et al., 2019).

The second approach suggests that EI results from personality, based on Petrides’ (2001) Trait Concept. This approach considers that EI is a personal specific dispositional attribute included in the domain of the personality or temperament and related exclusively to

the emotional facets of the character (MacCann et al., 2004). Trait EI is assessed using the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), developed by Petrides in 2001. The TEIQue (Petrides, 2001) evaluates and measures personality traits rather than IQ-type variables. Petrides has declared that an individual's personality will determine their EI, and this trait-based EI is a "constellation of emotional self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies and could, therefore, be measured via the trait EI questionnaire" (2010, p. 137).

The third and final approach to be considered in this research study is mixed EI, which suggests EI combines cognitive ability and personality or emotional and social competencies (Bar-On, 2006; Boyatzis et al., 2000; Goleman, 1995, 2004). This mix of skills combines desirable behaviours and abilities; however, mixed EI has been labelled an umbrella term, encompassing various non-specific skills and competencies (Nguyen et al., 2021), weakening its credibility. Unfavourable criticism has been made against mixed EI, as it has been said to correspond too closely with the Big Five Personality Trait Theory (Webb et al., 2013). An example of a measure of this approach is the Model of Emotional Quotient (Bar-On, 2006), which was developed to measure general well-being using the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQI) (Bar-On, 2004). Using the EQI, EI is considered a mixture of traits (for example, persistence) and emotional awareness, constituting desirable behaviours.

Another example of a mixed EI scale is Goleman's (1995, 2004) Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI). The ECI uses five categories of skills or competencies: self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation, empathy, and adaptability in relationships. The ECI was superseded by the Emotional Social Competence Inventory (ESCI) (Boyatzis et al., 2000), which included social awareness and relationship management. The ESCI and the EQI

approaches are measures of cognitive ability and personality combinations. As with the trait EI, the criteria used to ascertain mixed EI are self-reporting instruments. Self-reports are open to criticism of those being measured, giving answers they believe are intended but not necessarily the answers the test takers think are closest to their honest response (Mayer et al., 2008). Self-report scores rely on the self-assessment of EI, which has been found to be only weakly correlated to actual EI levels (Derksen et al., 2002). Furthermore, they do not include logical interpretation of intelligence, rational cognition, or improving emotional response awareness (Mayer et al., 2008).

Despite the three main approaches to understanding EI, two command the field: ability (cognitive) and trait (personality). Most of the 40-plus assessment tools assembled between 1995 and 2024 (Youde et al., 2024) focus on either ability or trait approaches. The approaches indicate that emotional intelligence results from the interaction between the recognition and the regulation of emotions of the self and others (Mayer et al., 2000). This interaction has proved difficult to quantify and measure (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), hence the variety of tools and measures available to assess how individuals comprehend and manage emotional responses. Each scale or measure has functional parameters, although they may seem unwieldy and incorporate too much information to understand quickly or easily.

The large variety of conceptualisations and types of measures to assess them has resulted in ongoing critical debate about the validity of EI (Harms & Credé, 2010; Murphy et al., 2006). Questions have also been asked about the subsequent validity of the measures available to assess EI (MacCann et al., 2004). The different views on the definition and measurement have made it difficult to prevent it from being a catch-all term that describes everything in general but may be lacking in specific detail. Calls have been made for a single consistent definition of EI (Cherniss, 2010). Similarly, Locke called for abolishing the



concept altogether as “the concept of EI has now become so broad, and the components so variegated that no one concept could encompass or integrate all of them” (Locke, 2005, p. 426), evidenced by the burgeoning research and proliferation of EI-related texts.

Having discussed the various measures available to quantify EI, the standard most closely aligned to the areas of EI selected by the researcher as being the most relevant to the research was the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT); the literature associated with the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2003) is now considered in more detail.

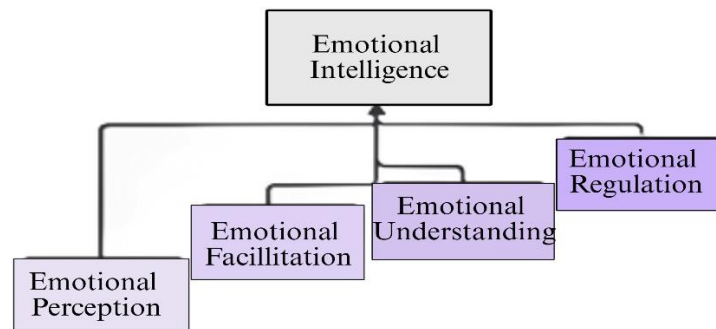
## **2.5. The Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT)**

Careful consideration of the various tests enabled the selection of a tutor whose EI had been measured by a test that identified the necessary qualities under discussion in this thesis. One of the most frequently used (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2018; Elfenbein & MacCann, 2017) is the Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) (Mayer et al., 2003). The MSCEIT is a four-branch hierarchical ability model test that compares attributes that have been ordered and are assessed using an objective test (Bru-Luna et al., 2021). The tool covers the four areas in the Four-Branch Model, shown in the diagram below (Figure 1). Mayer and Salovey (1997) depicted the model to show the four branches or hierarchies of EI:

- It represents the lowest branch, as the ability to perceive and express emotions.
- The next branch incorporates emotional facilitation or thinking and involves using emotional states for specific means.
- The subsequent branch is emotional understanding, which includes analysing and interpreting emotional meanings and their complex interplay.

- The final or highest branch is emotional regulation, which incorporates reflective, dynamic emotional management and is the ability to control one's emotions by moderating negative emotional responses.

- *Figure 1: The Four-Branch Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence*
  - (adapted from Salovey and Mayer 1997)



Multi Health Systems Incorporated administers the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2003), which is both lengthy to complete and costly to administer (Chandrapal et al., 2022) compared to self-scored tests. The scoring relies not on performance but on the scores derived from 21 field experts and 5,000 test takers (Mayer et al., 2012). The MSCEIT is widely endorsed and has been heavily studied (Bru-Luna et al., 2021) and, as a result, has been used as the basis for other models. (See, for example, Joseph & Newman, 2010.) The result has been a detrimental limitation towards research into EI as there is a reliance on the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2003).

The single test reliance could lead to a singular method bias, whereby the validity of most EI research depends on data generated using the same instrument. Critics further compound this, suggesting it is appropriate to be cautious about generalising universal scores from observed scores (Maul, 2012). Petrides (2007) proposed that ability performance measures should measure EI. However, he added that such measures must be biased as the

definition of EI has yet to be agreed upon. Claims have also been made that the MSCEIT is not performance-based as it fails to measure intelligent responses to emotionally charged situations (MacCann et al., 2004). Questions have also been raised about whether the MSCEIT should be redesigned as a 3-factor model, as two areas (perceive and facilitate) are said to be indistinguishable from each other (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2018). Mayer et al. (2024) recently indicated their agreement with the changes, describing the perceiving ability as multifactorial, suggesting that a factor of connecting emotions may also be included following ongoing research.

Nevertheless, other tests, such as trait tests, are not without criticism. They rely on self-scored responses to questions and are open to self-improved answers (Han et al., 2022), which may include fabrication (Bru-Luna et al., 2021). Self-reporting is open to bias and faking (Platsidou, 2010) or may indicate that the test takers find it hard to self-judge (Cherniss, 2010; MacCann et al., 2004). Fabrication may become an issue if the test-taker knows that the results will be seen by their employer (for example), in which case their answers may be constructed in a socially desirable way. Fabricated responses are considered a significant detriment for self-report scales (Zeidner et al., 2008). Nonetheless, tests taken for personal development rather than those prescribed by the workplace are less inclined to include fabrication (O'Connor et al., 2019). Consequently, the results may be sceptically received as they have acknowledged traits, not just abilities (Mayer et al., 2008). Self-report tools also suffer from questions about the ecological validity of the test environment and the impact this has on the results (Bru-Luna et al., 2021).

Despite its criticisms, the MSCEIT is used by many researchers in the field of EI as the tool of choice, as shown above. It is still the most widely used (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2018) and is considered the most “valid tool” (Maul, 2012, p. 394). The MSCEIT has been

referred to as the best test to measure EI (Murphy et al., 2006) and “the most important performance test of EI” (Gutiérrez-Cobo et al., 2016, p. 102). The MSCEIT is also considered the best measure of ability EI and has been the most rigorously researched (Bucich & MacCann, 2019) and has generated the most research in peer-reviewed journals (Majeski et al., 2017). MacCann et al. (2014) analysed the MSCEIT using 688 participants. They concluded that EI is an ability factor that can be usefully measured using the MSCEIT.

The MSCEIT was chosen as the measure of the tutor’s EI, as the abilities investigated by the Four-Branch Ability Model (Salovey & Mayer, 1997) aligned with the potential to answer the research questions. The attributes of the tutor who would function as the participants’ gatekeeper (Lewin, 1943) were considered under the headings of emotional perception, facilitation, understanding and regulation. The gatekeeper acts as the access point to the participants in a research study (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016). The tutor-gatekeeper’s role in this research was to allow access to her former students, and her actions within the VLE indirectly became the study’s focus. This research is not concerned with proving the absolute validity of EI tests, as that does not align with the research questions or phenomenological stance employed by the research. However, validating the participants’ experiences with first-hand knowledge of a tutor who could be identified as being emotionally intelligent was necessary. The focus of this research is the students’ perceptions of their emotionally intelligent tutor, so it was crucial that the tutor took part in a recognised test and was given a score demonstrating that they were emotionally intelligent.

Having decided on the scale used to assess the tutor’s EI, tutors in the university were asked by word of mouth if their EI had been assessed using the MSCEIT and then, if so, would be willing to allow access to their students. They were requested to act as gatekeepers (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016) to allow access to the potential sample population (Cohen &

Abedallah, 2015). Two tutors agreed in principle, and their MSCEIT scores were carefully considered. Both tutors scored highly, but one tutor had an exceptionally high score that the researcher felt would bias the results. The researcher believed that data generated by association with that tutor might not be able to be replicated by repeated research as such individuals are difficult to locate in real life. Thus, the remaining tutor was selected. For this research study, the researcher did not retest the tutor's EI attributes but utilised the previously generated score from the MSCEIT (Mayer, 2002). The tutor was found to be in the competent MSCEIT category for EI with an actual score of 117 (see Table 1 below for comparative score values).

*Table 1: Guidelines for Scoring the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2002)*

<b>Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EIQ) Range</b>	<b>Qualitative Range</b>
69 or less	Consider Development
70 – 89	Consider Improvement
90 – 99	Low Average Score
100 – 109	High Average Score
<b>110 – 119</b>	<b>Competent</b>
120 – 129	Strength
130 or more	Significant Strength

Having used a recognised measure to ascertain that the tutor's score was at the high end of the competent level of EI, which demonstrates her to be well above average levels of EI, this discussion moves on to consider the integrative model of EI used when discussing EI with the participants.

## **2.6. A Working Definition of EI that the Participants Understood**

During the pilot for the interviews (see section 3.16) and through email contact with the participants, it was discovered that not all the participants had a working knowledge of the concept of EI. As has been demonstrated, there are conflicting views about EI. Therefore, ensuring the participants were all aware of the different facets of EI under investigation was essential to enable them to deliver meaningful data relevant to the research. Therefore, an integrative model of EI was adopted to facilitate the participants' understanding of the terminology. It has been suggested that utilising an integrative model provides a more straightforward identification of the concept (Seal & Andrews-Brown, 2010). To ensure an alignment between the assessment the tutor had experienced and the facets of EI under discussion, an integrative model comprising Mayer and Salovey's (1997) cognitive ability EI utilising four constituents: emotional perception, emotional facilitation, emotional understanding, and emotional regulation was developed.

Using the integrative model ensured that the focus of the discussion with the participants centred on the Tutor's EI as prescribed by the model. In this way, the data generated was relevant to the research. For this study, Vaida & Opre's (2014, p. 27) definition that EI can correspond to a desirable skill set that can "support the identification, processing and management of emotions" has been selected as the working definition of EI. Their definition encompasses identifying emotions in oneself and others, the self-management of emotional states, and enabling others to do the same. Developing an integrative model to choose the facets of EI included in this research allowed the participants to understand the tutor's EI qualities being investigated. It was succinct enough for the participants to understand. It simultaneously encompassed the areas of EI focussed on by this research, and it was used as a framework to explore their perceptions of studying with an

emotionally intelligent tutor. Table 2 shows the relationship between Vaida and Opre's (2014) working definition of EI and the Mayer and Salovey (1997) cognitive ability domains explored in this thesis.

*Table 2: Shows the Alignment of the Working Definition of EI Based on Vaida & Opre's (2014) and Mayer and Salovey's (1997) Definitions.*

<b>Vaida &amp; Opre's (2014) Working Definition of EI facets:</b>	<b>Mayer &amp; Salvey's (1997) Cognitive Ability Domains: The Four-Branch Model</b>  (Ranked by ability, (1) being the easiest to perform see Figure 1 above.))
Identify the emotions of the self	Emotional perception (branch 1)
Identify the emotions of others	Emotional facilitation (branch 2)
The self-management of the emotional state	Emotional understanding (branch 3)
Enabling others to self-manage their emotional state	Emotional regulation (branch 4)

Careful consideration of and definition of EI is fundamental in EI research as in the past, "few EI researchers are willing to be specific" (Conte, 2005, p. 437), resulting in vague research that does not add to the clarity of the concept. To enable a greater understanding of EI, the two constituents, emotion, and intelligence and how they are used to build the construct of EI (Côté, 2014; Mayer, 1997) should be carefully considered. As has been shown, EI has been constructed to be abilities that incorporate emotions and intelligence. Repeated attempts have been made to clarify EI, with the founders of the concept revisiting and redefining it for many years as their understanding developed. However, without a clear consensus on the definition, it is hard to be sure what has been investigated. EI has been argued to be personal abilities that complement each other and interrelated capabilities that reinforce each other (Eberz et al., 2020). In this study, the working definition of EI, developed from Vaida and Opre's (2014) work, is the identification of emotions in oneself

and others, the self-management of emotional states and the ability to enable others to do the same.

This section has articulated the working definition of EI used to explain the concept to the participants. As emotions and intelligence are foundational to EI this thesis briefly considers the meanings attributed to the words emotional and intelligence before discussing the aspects of emotional intelligence relevant to this work.

### ***2.6.1 Defining Emotion***

Emotions include moods, evaluations and feelings such as fatigue (Mayer, 1997). Emotional responses are transient reactions to the actual, imagined, neurophysiological, external or internal stimuli that individuals face (Shuman & Scherer, 2014). Different emotions, such as fear or joy, result from daily encounters and situations an individual contends with (Côté, 2014). Emotional responses allow individuals to adapt to positive or negative environmental changes (Keltner et al., 2019). Emotions are experienced and expressed in three diverse ways:

- How a person feels emotion (the subjective and uniquely individual experience),
  - How a person demonstrates their emotions (the expression of their feelings) and
  - How an individual's body responds to their emotions (the physiological response)
- (Bastiaansen et al., 2019).

Many bodily systems are, therefore, implicated in an emotional response, from the heightened colour of a blush of embarrassment to the acute hearing response to a baby's cry of distress (Keltner et al., 2019). In this way, emotion and emotional expression are socially influenced. As a result of novel experiences, neural responses are triggered (Siegel, 2020). With repetition, they may become unconsciously integral to the emotional response an



individual may exhibit, and again, such a response may be regulated by the prevailing societal norms the individual is exposed to (Minbashian et al., 2018).

Having established a foundational understanding of emotion and its expressions, it is now necessary to consider intelligence, as the interplay between these two constructs forms the basis of emotional intelligence.

### **2.6.2 *Defining Intelligence***

Intelligence can be broadly defined as the ability of each person to reason, take purposeful actions and reactions, and respond effectively to their environment. Intelligence is “one’s ability to form and grasp concepts, especially higher-level or more abstract concepts” (Locke, 2005, p. 425). An individual’s IQ is a conscious ability to think, understand and analyse problems (Sternberg, 1985); mental capacity includes altering one’s cultural setting to improve one’s environment. Those individuals who possess more significant levels of intelligence develop their rational and problem-solving abilities, as IQ is understood to be “individual differences in cognition” (Kovacs & Conway, 2019, p. 257). To be included as an intelligence, Gardner’s definition was:

A human intellectual competence must entail a set of problem-solving skills enabling the individual to resolve genuine problems or difficulties that he encounters and, when appropriate, to create an effective product and must also entail the potential for finding or creating problems. (Gardner, 2011, p. 64).

This succinct view of intelligence has been acknowledged and adopted in this research study as it appropriately describes the attributes of intelligence, incorporated with emotion, and used to describe emotional intelligence in this thesis. The incorporation of the two attributes, emotion and intelligence, is now considered and discussed.

## 2.7. Incorporating Emotion and Intelligence in the VLE

Integrating the connotations of its integral elements of intelligence and emotion, EI is a uniquely individual collection of abilities which result in emotional responses (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The definition of EI should connect the two constituent words and, at the same time, conserve their meanings, as not every aspect that conjoins intelligence to emotion is EI. However, it can be understood that EI is the ability to reason with emotions (Mayer, 1997).

Meyer's (2014) research has indicated that emotionally intelligent tutors could support their students emotionally through tutor-student relationships and ensure their students' emotional needs are met by engaging with them. The quality of the emotional climate within the learning space has been directly attributed to the tutor (Evans et al., 2009). The tutor must manage their own and their students' emotional displays to maintain a harmonious environment in which to study effectively. Arghode et al.'s (2022) review of EI suggested that an emotionally intelligent tutor may have the cognisance to interpret their own and their students' emotions and enable the regulation of those emotions to facilitate a harmonious learning environment. It was pointed out by Awwad (2022) that the careful regulation of emotions in the classroom to create positive learning environments is made more accessible by the teacher's EI. It would follow that in the VLE, having an emotionally intelligent tutor would be similarly advantageous in regulating the emotional learning environment.

It has also been suggested that emotionally intelligent tutors can build and maintain sensitive relationships with each student to meet their emotional needs and deliver effective tutoring (Meyer, 2014). This study aims to investigate and corroborate the prior research to discover the realities of having an emotionally intelligent tutor for the participants. It seeks to determine if the students felt that the tutor adequately met their emotional needs and their

perceptions of the tutor's EI in the VLE. The impact of the tutor on the learning climate in the VLE will also be considered. The intention is to clarify if the points made by previous research about emotionally intelligent tutors' abilities are valid for this study's online student participants. This section has demonstrated how the two notions of emotion and intelligence are incorporated into EI. The following section expands on the concept and discusses the EI abilities associated with this research study.

## **2.8. Emotional Intelligence Abilities Considered in this Research.**

Every person has various and variable amounts of the different abilities that constitute EI. For this research, the abilities derived from Vaida and Opre's (2014) work under consideration are:

- Self-Emotional Appraisal (SEA)
- Other's Emotional Appraisal (OEA)
- Self-Regulate Emotions (SRE) and
- Other's Emotional Regulation. (OER)

### **2.8.1 *Self-Emotional Appraisal***

Identifying one's emotional state or the expression of emotions of the self (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) describes how efficiently an individual can label, understand, and express their emotions (Côté, 2014). Self-awareness is a crucial component of EI, and self-awareness growth is vital for the development of EI (Majeski et al., 2017). Individuals with this ability may better evaluate and clearly express their emotions to others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). An emotionally intelligent tutor who can perform SEA could convey their approval to their students more successfully to motivate and encourage the students' endeavours (Côté, 2014). Tutors, adept at recognising and understanding their own emotional responses, are more

likely to be open to interpreting their students' feelings and needs. Such tutors may be able to motivate their students to apply themselves to the required tasks (Dewaele et al., 2018).

### **2.8.2 *Other's Emotional Appraisal***

Perceiving and identifying another's emotions describes how easily emotionally intelligent tutors can empathise with and distinguish a student's emotional state by, for instance, monitoring their vocal inflexion, facial expression, or choice of vocabulary (Côté, 2014). Tutors with this empathetic ability of OEA may be viewed as being friendly by their students, encouraging them to share their concerns with the tutor. The expression and sharing of emotional feelings could be beneficial in helping to remove any barriers to learning that the student is experiencing (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Individuals with high EI can perceive another's emotions and distinguish their validity (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Being attuned to another's emotional state can allow an emotionally intelligent tutor to 'read' the student's feelings (Majeski et al., 2017) and provide each student with appropriate support. EI may engage the ability to use emotion-related information and emotions to enhance thought processes and apply reason to those thoughts and emotions (Mayer et al., 2016). Individuals who possess the OEA quality may be seen as approachable and genuine by the students (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Tutors with higher levels of OEA will be able to empathise with their students' emotions, act accordingly, and perceive negativity during online learning sessions in the VLE or that is inherent in students' work (Ali et al., 2017). Working remotely in the VLE may impact one's ability to pick up or give emotional cues, and EI may enable the tutor to do so. Accurate identification improves emotional expression and appropriate emotional responses and enables socially adaptive behaviours (Majeski et al., 2017). When working in the VLE, emotionally intelligent tutors should be able to understand their students' emotional

responses and have the skillset to assess and meet their learning requirements, which in turn may generate increased student learning and comprehension (Arghode et al., 2022).

### ***2.8.3 Self-Regulation of Emotions***

EI is the ability to use emotions to enhance thought (Mayer et al., 2016) and emotionally self-manage. Using one's emotions to direct personal performance and regulate the expression of such emotions so they are appropriate to any situation is a critical component of EI (Dirican & Erdil, 2020). SRE is the deliberate "conscious regulation of emotions" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 14). Individuals with the ability to SRE will be capable of understanding the effect of their emotional state on their mental abilities and skills (Côté, 2014) and maintaining favourable social interactions (Nguyen et al., 2022).

Tutors experience a high volume of interpersonal reactions daily, and the ability to contain their emotions and those of their students to create a harmonious learning environment has been found to be positively moderated by an increased EI (Dewaele et al., 2018). Tutors who perform SRE are more likely to be adaptable and able to self-motivate while encouraging their students to do the same (Majeski et al., 2017). Emotionally intelligent tutors will be cognisant and able to understand and recognise their emotional cues and alter or modify their behaviour while being conscious of their emotions (Nelson et al., 2017). Emotionally intelligent tutors may also enhance their cognitive abilities by utilising emotions to improve their decision-making processes (Mayer, 1997). Tutors with a higher EI may be self-motivated to maintain and extend their positive emotional state and decrease and diminish their negative emotional state (Majeski et al., 2017).

The self-regulation of emotions is acknowledging one's emotional state without unnecessarily dwelling on it while simultaneously controlling for and responding appropriately by regulating intensity or duration (Côté, 2014). The SRE has been linked to

maintaining healthy relationships (Dirican & Erdil, 2020), as individuals who possess this ability will intrinsically understand the appropriateness of their emotional states and alter them accordingly (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotionally intelligent individuals who engage in self-regulation may be able to project a calm persona in any disruptive environment (Sheppes et al., 2014). They may better control their emotional state and recover quickly from psychological distress (Dirican & Erdil, 2020), which can reassure and encourage their students. A recent study by Machisi (2023) indicated that an emotionally competent teacher could motivate their students by modulating their language and using emotional regulation to avoid causing mental harm. Sanchez (2016) found emotional regulation to emanate from EI and said it is based on the individual's knowledge and belief systems. Emotional regulation has been noted by Kaur et al. (2019, p. 3) to be "the most important ability for teachers". The prior research in face-to-face teaching indicates that in the VLE, where the remote emotional climate of the lesson is more demanding to police, SRE may also be a crucial skill for tutors working there.

#### **2.8.4 *Other's Emotional Regulation***

Individuals who can "reason about various aspects of emotions" (Côté 2014, p. 466) may better understand others' emotional expressions and enable them to manage their emotions by using their innate understanding between spoken words and emotions. Tutors capable of OER should understand that basic emotions are conjoined to form more complex or challenging emotions, and students may sometimes need help to negotiate their emotional responses to events in the classroom. Emotionally intelligent tutors may utilise their OER to help their students manage their complex or difficult emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), potentially ensuring their time in the VLE is productive and efficient.

The four abilities discussed above appear to be valuable skills for tutors working in a VLE and are relevant to this study, which investigates student perceptions of the tutor's EI skillset whilst learning in a VLE. The first skill, SEA, has been identified as helpful for tutors (Nguyen et al., 2021). Tutors should be able to know and understand and, therefore, modulate their emotional response to maintain a calm but warm persona, as found by Dewaele et al. (2018). The second skill, SRE, indicates that emotionally intelligent tutors could ensure the VLE is a mutually productive learning space (Majeski et al., 2017). The third skill is that of emotionally intelligent tutors, recognising students' emotional responses (OEA) to improve their learning within the VLE (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Finally, emotionally intelligent tutors could facilitate student engagement and understanding. Students exposed to positive tutor emotions in the VLE have been found to apply themselves more assiduously and engage more, even when they consider the subject matter challenging to master (Majeski et al., 2017). In this way, the tutor enables the students' emotional regulation (OER). This research study will focus on the students' perceptions of their tutor's EI and their appraisal of how well the tutor was able to employ her EI to facilitate the four investigated abilities. It will consider the importance that the participants ascribe to each of the four areas to understand their potential relevance and impact to this study.

## **2.9. Summary of Part One of the Literature Review**

This first part of the literature review considered the background of emotional intelligence and followed the timeline from its inception to the present day. In doing so, it highlighted the significant developments within the concept of EI and discussed the tensions surrounding it. There followed a discussion about the measures of EI currently available and a justification for selecting the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2003) used to measure the tutor's EI in this thesis. This research study uses the definition of EI stated by (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p.

189): “Emotional Intelligence involves the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions”. Based on Vaida and Opre’s (2014) research, the working definition used for the participants is that EI corresponds to a desirable skill set that encompasses identifying emotions in oneself and others, the self-management of emotional states, and enabling others to do the same. Vaida and Opre’s (2014) definition has been aligned with Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) definition to show where the theoretical view of EI and a more easily understood view are in harmony. An explanation of the relevant aspects of EI (SEA, OEA, SRE and OME) incorporated into the research and considered by the student participants was also included and discussed, highlighting the reasons for their inclusion.

This thesis now turns to the methodology and design chosen to align with the research paradigm to address the gap in current understanding, which will be explored in the following Methodology Chapter Three.



### 3. Chapter Three: Methodological Approach and Methodology

#### 3.1. Introduction

The methodology chapter in phenomenological research should be viewed as a route that enables the reader to understand how Others' perceptions will allow them to make meanings of and understand a phenomenon. Phenomenological research often travels routes that are indistinct and less well-demarcated; thus, the researcher is required to carefully plan and map the journey taken (Mortari, 2008). A phenomenological research study considers Other's *Lebenswelt* (life-world) experiences, and it can be challenging to accomplish, in part because Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who is said to be the founder of the modern phenomenological movement, did not leave succinct instructions on how the researcher was to accomplish the process. Husserl evolved and refined his thinking about phenomenology and, on many occasions, enumerated the rudiments of the philosophy of phenomenology without troubling to explain how his thought processes had altered the performance of doing phenomenology (Duranti, 2010). Thus, it renders phenomenological research and its journey as individualistically complex and it requires careful notetaking and journalling to document the research decisions that have been made, which will be discussed later in this chapter in more detail.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed opportunities for enduring changes, so it is apt to choose phenomenology as the research paradigm, as new and uncertain times call for research that focuses on what is new and how it is experienced. This research is posited within the phenomenological parameters as the researcher was interested in discovering how the students experienced and recognised tutor EI and what value they placed upon it, if any.

The data comprises the participants' lived experiences and was gathered using semi-structured interviews. Interviews provide a deeper understanding of the students' interactions

in the VLE with their tutor and allow the phenomenological investigation to explore the specific issues of being a VLE student. Comprehending the lived experiences (*Lebenswelt*) (Husserl, 1970) of students who study online with emotionally intelligent tutors can help tutors and institutions see the worth of initial and ongoing tutor EI development for both the tutor and the students, as well as potentially increased performance and, therefore, satisfaction for their institutions.

Emotional intelligence research typically concerns itself with the first-person impact of being emotionally intelligent from a psychological viewpoint (Chen et al., 2016; Slåtten et al., 2021); consideration of another's perspective is generally absent. This research uses a qualitative approach to address this under-researched area, considering the student's views of another's (the tutor's) EI. It also considers the effect of the tutor's emotional intelligence on their students in the context of teaching in a VLE. Simply knowing a student has emotional needs will not meet those needs or advance their academic achievements. This research will consider whether having emotional intelligence and thus being able to discern those needs and act accordingly may enable the tutor to meet them from the students' perspectives.

Chapter Three considers the methodological philosophical principles that are the foundation for this research; it is divided into two main sections: the methodological underpinning and the research methods. The methodological section begins by including the research aims and questions to show the relevance of the logical discussion to this thesis. Then, the discussion moves on to the research paradigm chosen to answer the research questions. This chapter continues by reviewing aspects of qualitative phenomenological data-gathering methods. This is followed by a brief overview of phenomenology, highlighting the philosophical and methodological background. A history of and comparison to the Husserlian and Heideggerian principles follows, which underpin this study with a phenomenological

philosophy to answer the research questions. The two branches of phenomenological study used in this thesis are carefully explained so their harmonised synergistic phenomenological approach (SPA) use may be readily understood.

The chapter acknowledges the tensions surrounding phenomenology compared to other qualitative research paradigms and then explores the ontological and epistemological stances adopted. Then, the chapter continues with a consideration of *Intentionality* (Husserl, 1970) and its role in this phenomenological study. A discussion about the researcher's role follows, and the steps taken to *Bracket* prior knowledge and avoid bias in describing the phenomenon as the participants experienced it in their *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) whilst acknowledging that the phenomenon may be concealed by *Vergessenheit* (forgetfulness) (Heidegger et al., 2010). The actions taken to achieve the hermeneutic circle of knowledge and understanding (Lavery, 2003) by incorporating *Da-sein* (what does it mean to be in the world) (Heidegger et al., 2010) are also discussed. Finally, this section concludes and links the Methodological Approach Section to the Research Design Section.

### **3.2. Part One of the Methodology: The Methodological Approach**

It has been previously observed that social research and its outcomes often have particular significance for the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher's interest in this study was a primary motivator of this research. She had been a university student for ten years and noted the difficulties that presented themselves in the COVID-19 pandemic with online learning for herself and her fellow students. The researcher was curious to see if student perspectives could give some insight into their experiences, if they had any suggestions to improve outcomes and if including an emotionally intelligent tutor had any positive impact. A research study was devised to understand their perspectives on their experiences of being an online student with an emotionally intelligent tutor, and it was

framed with a primary and a secondary research question. The questions posed to identify the students' experiences were:

- How do students recognise and experience the tutor's emotional intelligence in synchronous online learning contexts?
- How do students recognise and value the tutor's emotional intelligence levels in synchronous online learning contexts?

Both questions were considered using the previously highlighted working definition of EI: the identification of emotions in oneself and others, the self-management of emotional states and the ability to enable others to do the same (Vaida & Opre, 2014). The research questions were used to illuminate how the participants experienced their tutor's EI in a VLE and their perceptions of the intrinsic value they ascribed to the tutor's EI. This phenomenological research defines the student participant experience and is contextualised by being student experiential-centric.

The following section begins by discussing the chosen methodology.

### **3.3. Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative research makes “material practices visible” (Denzin Norman et al., 2024), which allows the unseen to be noticed. Qualitative research produces rich, in-depth contextual data (Sarantakos, 2013); unlike quantitative research, it does not begin with hypotheses but may make a hypothesis at the end of the analysis. Critics of qualitative research have pointed out that frequently, qualitative research does not end with a conclusive argument for or against the research question but merely points the way to research further (Becker, 2017). Nonetheless, qualitative methods can illuminate a phenomenon, highlighting the need for further research to deepen understanding (Høffding et al., 2022). This thesis may be seen as a logical stepping stone in discovering the currently unknown phenomenon of

students being aware of and valuing their tutor's emotional intelligence. It answers the research questions succinctly, which may open the field for further study.

A qualitative approach enables the researcher to consider phenomena from the participants' perspectives instead of objectifying them. It allows the study of phenomena in a social world (Clarke & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative approaches utilise enquiry to illuminate and clarify a deeper understanding of a phenomenon by centring on the experiences and viewpoints of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research does not use numbers or statistics as quantitative research does, nor is the research outcome defined this way (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). It uses words (written or spoken) or images to deliver deep and complex data unique to the participant that may when analysed, reveal themes relevant to others in similar circumstances (van Manen, 2016b). This research's focus on data generated through the spoken word instead of from numerical data aligned this thesis with the qualitative paradigm (Høffding et al., 2022).

Having thus aligned this research to a qualitative stance; this thesis now considers the methods that could be employed to answer the research questions.

### **3.4. The Selection of the Phenomenological Research Paradigm**

Three of the possible design methods employed in qualitative research, highlighted by the researcher as being the most closely aligned and having the potential to answer the research questions, were identified as grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology (Crotty, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). All three methods aim to establish a new understanding and advance knowledge; however, they use different principles. The three methods were considered carefully to justify the approach that was chosen.

Grounded theory generates or discovers a theory schema or an abstract related to a particular situation (Glaser & Strauss, 2017), generating a theory grounded in the data using a

constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory studies collect and simultaneously analyse the data using the emerging theory to help make decisions about future data collection; this cycle continues until data saturation is achieved (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The results from grounded theory studies are used to help form theoretical models, frameworks, and the production of theories (Glaser & Holton, 2007). Thus, grounded theory concerns itself with theory production due to the systematic analysis of the data and the need to construct a theorem from the ground up (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and uses distinct levels of coding to help construct the theory (Dunne & Üstündağ, 2020).

The second potential method that could have been used was ethnography, the goal of which is to understand the social world of the participant within the setting being studied. It requires the researcher to become immersed in the life and culture of the participants as it includes the direct observation of the participants involved in the study area. It is a type of social research based on fieldwork (Carspecken, 2013) in which the researcher joins the participants' world. Ethnography is particularly relevant when the proposed research studies people and their shared culture. It is an appropriate methodology when researching the beliefs, behaviours and language used in cultural groups or exploring issues such as power within a cultural group (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It considers the social culture of the participant and is immersive and particular. The focus is on a group of individuals and their culture and requires the researcher to participate in that cultural setting. It aims to consider a singular group's viewpoints of their conceptual world (Sobo, 2016) and is useful when the research question asks about the reality of a collective cultural understanding of a given group.

The third potential method was phenomenology. The conventional meaning of phenomenology is the study of the world inhabited by another; its approach gives credence to

the profound exploration of another's internalised viewpoint (Leavy, 2014). Phenomenology seeks to deliver authentic human descriptions from the participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Katz, 1999) and allows others to understand the fundamental truths about the lived experiences (Thomas, 2021) and the world in which the phenomenon sits (Vagle, 2018). The phenomenon in phenomenological research is as it presents itself or as a subject experiences it (Dahlberg et al., 2008). The *Logos* in the term phenomenology means discourse and implies the fusing of language and thought whilst ensuring the phenomenon's *Essence* is uncovered (van Manen, 2016b).

A phenomenological approach aims to broaden the understanding of a human perspective of a phenomenon (van Manen, 2016b), focusing attention on investigating the new and the novel experience to reveal the *Essence* (Husserl, 2012a), which is facilitated by freedom from pre-suppositions (Finlay & Evans, 2009). Phenomenology aims to consider the phenomenon's *Essence* in depth only from the singular perspective of the participants with direct experience of it. Phenomenological research delivers genuine accounts of multiplex phenomena focusing on the individual's experiences. The everyday *Natural Attitude* of the participants in their *Lebenswelt* (everyday life-world) (Husserl, 1970) can obscure Others' understanding of the phenomenon. The phenomenological *Natural Attitude* is removed from anything to do with nature but instead implies the ordinary way of being in one's world (Duranti, 2009), the unconscious everyday way human beings are in their worlds. The researcher reflects on the unconscious way of being and acting within the *Lebenswelt* to capture the participant's interpretation of reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By considering the participants in their *Lebenswelt* and understanding their reality, the phenomenon's *Essence* is revealed (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

This research investigated a novel phenomenon to discover the in-depth experiences of a small group of female students, with the researcher approaching the data generation and analysis in an open, naive, and receptive manner. The researcher became immersed in the participants' descriptions of their everyday worlds (*Lebenswelt*) to reveal credible insights into the phenomenon (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020). Phenomenology does not focus on the participants or their *Lebenswelt* itself but rather on the *Essence* of the relationship between the two (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It is an approach that disrupts the *Natural Attitude* of the ways of being in the phenomenon and, in so doing, intentionally reveals how the *Lebenswelt* interacts with and within the world of the participants (Husserl, 1970). It is not the phenomenon or *Thing* (Husserl, 2013b, p. 168) that is being studied. It is the consciousness of the participants of the experiences as they present to themselves (Vagle, 2018).

Grounded theory and ethnography were rejected as incompatible with answering the research questions. Phenomenology was identified as the most suitable way to conduct this research as it supports the exploration of visible and invisible experiences so that others may learn from these experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). Previous studies have linked phenomenology to educational research, albeit focused on teachers' views rather than the students' (Boadu, 2021). This thesis investigated a novel phenomenon and considered the participants' *Lebenswelt*, their first-hand descriptions of the phenomenon, and how they experienced it from their perspective (Husserl, 1970). This research provided evidence of students' perceptions and ability to recognise and value a tutor's EI level.

Qualitative phenomenological research is determined by clarifying the research's purpose at the study's onset (Richards & Morse, 2013). This study investigated students' recognition and valuing of tutor emotional intelligence (EI) within a virtual learning environment (VLE). This aspect of EI's usefulness has not been explored despite prior calls



to investigate the phenomenon (Youde, 2020). Areas of enquiry into new and hitherto unexplored research paradigms which focus on the descriptive and analytical experiences of the participants are investigated using phenomenology, which considers the way an experience (phenomenon) is “given or shows itself” (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020, p. 259) to be. Phenomenology allows us to learn from and empathise with other’s experiences; indeed, it has been contended that scholars must learn from others as it is the basis for research, although this may not always be easily accomplished (Neubauer et al., 2019).

The preceding paragraphs have aligned the research to a qualitative phenomenological perspective; this study focused on a new phenomenon by asking the participants to reveal their *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 2013a) experiences as online students with an emotionally intelligent tutor. The researcher considered and acknowledged the inseparability of the participants from their *Lebenswelt* via their *Natural Attitudes*. (Husserl, 1970) as it is within the *Lebenswelt* that the participants’ experiences exist. Moreover, the researcher encountered the participants’ *Lebenswelt* descriptions in a naive manner, lacking preconceptions to maintain the authenticity of the participants’ voices.

This thesis now presents and contrasts the two phenomenological methods on which this research was founded: Husserlian transcendental (descriptive) (Giorgi, 2010; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) and Heideggerian hermeneutic (interpretive) (Given, 2008), and begins by discussing Husserlian transcendental phenomenology.

### **3.5. Husserlian Transcendental Phenomenology**

Historically, phenomenology is grounded in philosophy and has been studied in various forms since antiquity (Moustakas, 1994). However, modern-day phenomenology was initially a 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophical European movement that arose from the German philosopher Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) belief that an empirical research approach was

inappropriate when researching human subjects as they respond to external stimuli by according to those stimuli meanings (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl said that these meanings needed to be considered as part of his exhortation to phenomenology and phenomenologists to return “zu den Sachen selbst!” (to the things themselves) (Husserl, 2013b, p. 168). In a phenomenological sense, Smith et al. translated that to mean “turning to experience as lived through” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 3). Husserl articulated phenomenology as “a new way of doing philosophy” (Moran, 2000, p. 1) and characterised it with the focus of attention on the individual’s subjective experiences. Husserl’s phenomenology was based on a philosophy that an individual’s reality will always be an intentional turn towards *Things* (Davis, 1991) that gain their importance within that individual’s *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) (Husserl, 1970). Husserl considered phenomenological research to be eidetic and, therefore, not empirical as it opened up a new “field of experience” (Husserl, 1983, p. 407).

Husserl’s philosophy was a rebuttal of the Cartesian Concepts (Descartes, 1988), wherein Descartes maintained that the mind was the sole reliquary of an individual’s consciousness. Husserl disagreed and considered that the mind constantly employed a relationship with conscious objects, that we think, and when we do, we think of something, and the something becomes a *Thing* in its own right (Husserl, 2013a). Husserl also rejected the then-dominant epistemologically positivist perspective, which was the sole philosophical means to understanding (Smith, 2003). Husserl maintained that consciousness constitutes the world whilst, at the same time, it is constructed from experiences in the world, and in this way, knowledge of the world (or phenomena) is created (Moran, 2000).

Phenomenology is the study of how phenomena appear to the participants, and its primary task, therefore, is to provide an authentic account of how things manifest to them (Husserl, 2013b). In so doing, phenomenological research has developed into a field of study

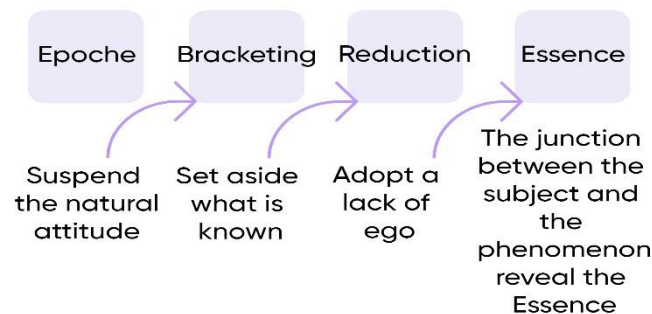
considering others' *Lebenswelt*. Husserl suggested that phenomenological research should focus on the participants' perception of their unique *Lebenswelt* (Dowling, 2007; Tanggaard, 2009) and the meanings this has for them. The *Lebenswelt* are "a world vibrating of meanings" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 172) that offers an experiential, rich and meaningful data stream to phenomenological research.

In this research study, the participants described their *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970), and the researcher illuminated these *Lebenswelt* experiences so that others may understand and, in this way, acknowledge their importance (Bradford, 2010). The *Lebenswelt* is the central foundation for understanding another's lived experience, necessitating the researcher being open and receptive to exploring the participants' unique *Lebenswelt* (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020). Husserl posited that things within an external world that do not have a personal impact should be disregarded, so the *Lebenswelt* is where the phenomenon should be explored (Groenewald, 2016). This research's focus on the *Lebenswelt* allowed the participants to consider the implications of their tutors' EI levels using a descriptive interview process to explore the significance of the tutors' EI and its impact on themselves. The emphasis was on everyone's lived experience. This research focussed on the participants' experiences of the tutor's EI using reflection upon experience to consider self-awareness, social interaction, and awareness of others and their actions (Zahavi, 2019).

Husserl suggested that a transcendental approach would enable the discovery of a phenomenon's fundamental core (*Essence*) (Moran, 2000). The phenomenological *Essence* is the point at which the objective world and the subjective individual connect. Husserlian transcendental phenomenology reveals *Essences* via *Phenomenological Reduction* (Husserl, 2012a). The *Essence* is the thing itself, the heart of the phenomenon, which is what is left after preconceptions have been removed. Husserl questioned how the science-based objective

epistemology at the time justified its position and considered that an impartial state of consciousness (transcendental) was “the most general subjectivity, which makes the world and its souls and confirms them” (Husserl, 1927, p. 699) and is accomplished through the *Epoché* and *Bracketing* and followed by the *Reduction*, a separate step achieved through them (Schmitt, 1959, p. 240). The *Epoché* is the change of *Natural Attitude* when the researcher suspends their belief in the objects of experience and adopts a reflective way of being (Husserl, 2013a). This contemplative attitude is detached from what was previously considered certainty and begins the process of the questioning attitude, where the *Epoché* ends (Husserl & Gibson, 2013) and the *Bracketing* to perform the *Reduction* can take place. The researcher striving to “bracket the objective world” (Husserl, 1931, p. 34) performs Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological reduction. The process is shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: To Show the Steps Taken to Understand the Essence of the Phenomenon



Husserl was first a mathematician, and to enable others to understand the *Reduction*, he used the term *Bracketing*, but his phenomenological brackets contained not numbers but self-meaning and self-knowledge so that their contents could be set aside and distanced and valued in a separate way (Husserl, 1983). Husserl exhorted phenomenologists to “leave aside all vague experiential lore” (Husserl, 1983, p. 93) and, in this way, lose the experiential meanings they had already acquired.

After *Bracketing*, the researcher is asked to relate differently to the world in which, before the *Reduction*, the researcher was in and to the world in which the researcher has transformed themselves into being. The *Reduction* is designed to reveal the researcher's ego, which relies on meanings to make understanding and to take the researcher back to a point before those meanings or understandings became explicit (Schmitt, 1959, p. 240). Thus, Husserl's transcendental (1960) phenomenology demands that the researcher *Epoché* prior knowledge and *Bracket* their pre-suppositions (Himanka, 2019; van Manen, 2016a), then the focus of the research epistemologically is on the relationship between the subjective participant and the object of the study (Lavery, 2003) as it is at this juncture that the phenomenon is made visible via the *Essence*.

Phenomenology should not be viewed as prescriptive, a singular methodology doctrine to be slavishly followed; phenomenology should be considered pluralistic with many different ways to utilise it (Gallagher, 2022; Vagle, 2019). In this study, the participants' *Lebenswelt* is subsequently given Husserlian transcendental (descriptive) (Giorgi, 2010) and Heideggerian hermeneutic (interpretational) (Given, 2008) meanings in a synergistic phenomenological approach whose aim was to thoroughly understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives using a harmonised fusion of approaches (Aguiar, 2022). The Husserlian approach focuses on the individual's experiences and their detailed description of the phenomenon. The researcher becomes an "observer" (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015, p. 253) and reveals, through *Bracketing*, the phenomenon's *Essence*.

The researcher was uniquely positioned in this research as she had little academic knowledge of EI when starting the study. Therefore, *Bracketing* prior knowledge was made more accessible by maintaining a distance from the literature used in Chapter Five. To have done a purely transcendental study would have produced faithful and naïve descriptions of

the participants' experiences. However, the resultant study would have lacked transferability, as the purely descriptive results are too individualistic to have any claims to transferability, as an individual's experience is entirely their own. Furthermore, the researcher intended to go beyond merely describing the phenomenon by becoming aware and using her own experiences as a student to hermeneutically understand the participants' experiences by interpreting and making meaning of them. Equally, focussing on a hermeneutic study where the aim is to interpret without describing would have produced results that would have been lacking in an extra layer of depth as a phenomenological study should focus on how the phenomena are presented or are shown to be by the participants (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020). The SPA allowed the participants' rich descriptions to have meanings made from them and claims for transferability to other students in online contexts to be made to enhance this study's contribution to knowledge. This synergistic approach enabled the participants' voices to be more clearly heard, interpreted and understood than if either branch of phenomenological enquiry had been adopted alone.

Transcendental phenomenology focuses primarily on the participants' consciousness and their description of the phenomenon (Lavery, 2003). It also uses the researcher as a conduit to record their voices faithfully without embellishment. This practice of phenomenological philosophy has the Husserlian focus on the *Essence* (Husserl, 2012a) of the phenomenon, which is revealed through the essential operation of the phenomenological transcendental *Reduction* (Husserl, 1983). Husserl's mentee, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), felt there was an alternative methodological design that phenomenology could follow. Heidegger termed it 'Hermeneutic Phenomenology' and said the focus should be on the nature of human existence and the way of being in the world (*Da-sein*) (Heidegger et al., 2010, p. 37). Husserl and Heidegger focused on how human subjects experience their world, but Heidegger critiqued the Husserlian approach with its focus on the individual experience

(Dourish, 2001). In contrast, Heidegger considered the participant's personal and cultural situation.

Heidegger's (1996) hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology (Mapp, 2008) is discussed and considered in the following section to show its relevance to this study.

### **3.6. Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Heidegger considered understanding to be the intrinsic core of human existence as it is how humankind approaches the world and is in the world (Edralin, 2017). He distinguished his approach to phenomenology by using the term hermeneutic and carefully built on the Greek root *phainómenon*, which means that which, when illuminated, shows itself to be and *logos*, which means discourse and letting the *Things* be seen truthfully (Heidegger et al., 2010, pp. 38-39). Thus, Heidegger used phenomenology to allow *Things* to show themselves as they are.

Heidegger renamed Husserl's *Lebenswelt* as "*In-der-Welt-sein*" (Being-in-the-World) (Heidegger et al., 2010, p. 53); he considered it essential to view the whole phenomenon and to consider how the participant constructed themselves to be culturally situated in the phenomenon (Heidegger et al., 2010) as human beings are absorbed with their ways of being in the world (Dreyfus, 1996). (Regardless, *Lebenswelt* will be used in this thesis for ease of reading.) Heidegger argued that phenomenology required a greater ontological focus and that the Husserlian idea of "*Things*" as being the focus was misplaced (Moran, 2000). He was concerned that a *Thing* could be hidden (Frechette et al., 2020) and disguised by a complex covering of *Vergessenheit* (forgetfulness) (Heidegger et al., 2010, p. 44). Heideggerian phenomenology is focused on how the phenomenon "shows itself as being and the structure of being" (Heidegger et al., 2010, p. 63) or how a thing loses its 'hiddenness' which may then be interpreted (Moran, 2000).

It is important to note that in his later years, Heidegger explained that he had ‘ceased to employ the term hermeneutics’ (Heidegger, 1971, p. 12) and instead spoke of the *Ereignis*, which means to name the event or happening where the *Things* come into conscious knowing (Schmidt, 2014). Heidegger said that hermeneutics had been a stepping stone along the route that his consciousness had taken towards the true meaning of understanding *Beings* and *Things* (phenomena) (Heidegger, 1971). However, as the term hermeneutic is more commonly associated with his branch of phenomenology, hermeneutics and its meaning as a tool to understand words by interpretation (Schmidt, 2014) is used in this research study whilst acknowledging the role Gadamer (2013) played in perpetuating the use and association with phenomenology of the word hermeneutics.

Our human way of being-in-the-world or being there is one of *Da-sein* (the German meaning of *Da-sein* is There-being) (Heidegger et al., 2010, pp. 13-14), the naturalistic way humans inhabit their worlds. Utilising hermeneutics, which is the interpretation of another’s unique perspective of a phenomenon (Heidegger et al., 2010), the phenomenon can be viewed through the concept of *Da-sein* or of being in the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2016). *Da-sein* is a tool of hermeneutic phenomenology; it means being a human being and, at the same time, being human. *Da-sein* is uniquely human, revealing the phenomenon by removing the *Vergessenheit* via discourse between the participant and the researcher (Buckley, 2019).

The *Vergessenheit* must be peeled away to reveal the sought phenomenon, as our perception of the phenomenon is hidden from view (Heidegger, 1996). *Vergessenheit* is not an obstruction; instead, it is an alternative way of being that may be removed by *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010). In this thesis, the interrelationship between the tutor’s EI and the participants’ subconscious understanding and recognition of it may have been *Vergessenheit*. The participants may or may not have consciously expressed their thoughts about the tutor’s



EI before the research commenced. The researcher was therefore responsible for the *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010), enabling the *Vergessenheit* to be peeled away to reveal the phenomenon within the participant's *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970). *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) may be understood through understanding. If the understanding is viewed as being sympathetically aware rather than just an objectified erudition, then that enables us to feel empathetic about something that another has experienced; in this way, interpretation is built on understanding and precisely the researcher's prior understandings (Edralin, 2017). The two approaches to phenomenology were used in synthesis in this thesis in a Synergistic Phenomenological Approach (SPA) as previously discussed in section 1.5 and which is recapped in the following section.

### **3.7. Utilising the Synergistic Phenomenological Approach**

The researcher carefully considered aspects of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology to harmonise as a structured conceptual approach. This approach allowed the researcher to draw on her empathetic understanding as a student, who initially lacked awareness of the concept of emotional intelligence, to present the data through a Husserlian (descriptive) lens. Additionally, her personal experience of being tutored by emotionally intelligent educators enabled her to apply a Heideggerian (interpretive) perspective to the data. The SPA facilitated a balanced process—combining empathetic description, systematic data analysis, and interpretative discussion—to enhance understanding of the students' perspectives.

The SPA also informed the data collection, presentation, and writing-up processes as the researcher continually re-engaged with the *Epoché* and *Bracketing* (Husserl, 2013a). Following the data presentation and description, the researcher embarked on the literature review, engaging her hermeneutic understanding (Dibley et al., 2020), moving between the

newly identified and her existing knowledge to deepen her understanding by utilising *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) to consider the participants' *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) and the connectedness between the researcher, the literature and the participants. The fluid back-and-forth reflexivity was consistent with phenomenological approaches. However, it could be considered incongruent with the traditional doctoral thesis, although it should be noted that Moran (2002) has pointed out that there are many different ways of interpreting and doing phenomenology.

This research utilised both Husserlian and Heideggerian principles in a deliberately fused manner (Aguas, 2022). The researcher did not investigate any literature around the phenomenon until after the data analysis to maintain her Husserlian phenomenological *Reduction* and not cause any bias towards the participants' data (Husserl, 1970). In this way, the researcher was open and receptive to the data as the participants gave it throughout the data-gathering process, during the descriptive write-up and presentation of the data and later when considering the literature. Nonetheless, while interpreting the findings, the researcher used her prior student experiences and understanding to help her look for commonalities within and to help interpret and understand the data and the phenomenon.

The method of interpretation was Hermeneutical Interpretive Phenomenology (Smith et al., 2022), which is now discussed.

### **3.8. Hermeneutical Interpretive Phenomenology**

Hermeneutics was utilised as the interpretation method; it precludes an exhaustive step-by-step method and involves prior knowledge and a hermeneutic circle of understanding (see Figure 3 section 3.11) between the participants' spoken words and their meanings (Lavery, 2003). Hermeneutical Interpretive Phenomenology (HIP) (Smith et al., 2022) is a distinct form of phenomenology (Lavery, 2003); it explores the participant's meaningful

interpretations of their lived experiences (Polit & Beck, 2021), embracing the concept of ‘mineness’ or the unique individualistic perspective of each participant (Zahavi, 2005, p. 15). HIP considers humans to be interpretive and to reside consciously within a world that constantly shapes their consciousness and impacts them (Given, 2008). HIP is simultaneously hermeneutics of the participant and the researcher, as the researcher employs *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) to remove the participants’ *Vergessenheit* (forgetfulness) to understand the phenomenon as the participant begins to recall and describe it.

This double hermeneutic process (see Figure 3) can be considered as a change of position of understanding between the description by the participant and the knowledge of the researcher where new understandings may be found. The understanding is achieved through a cyclical manner of examining the context and relating the new understanding to it and vice-versa (Suddick et al., 2020). The researcher considers this an essential part of the research as it is through this process that commonalities may be found that make the findings relatable and potentially make this unique research applicable to other students in VLEs tutored by emotionally intelligent tutors. The study commenced with the researcher empathising with the participant’s knowledge of the phenomenon (Joseph & Newman, 2010; Smith & Osborn, 2015) and using this empathy to enable an interpretive understanding.

The contemplation of qualitative research in general and phenomenological research in particular warrants careful thought, as criticisms have been made against them, which this thesis now considers. Concerns have been raised about qualitative research, particularly against the trustworthiness of the results. Nevertheless, the main problem appears to be applying quantitative criteria to qualitative results (Megheirkouni & Moir, 2023). A rigorous study clearly defined and well documented, reinforced by methods such as member checking

and researcher journalling (see 3.20 and 3.21 below), aids in affirming the validity of qualitative research.

Phenomenological studies have been criticised for their overly unique and individualised results, which may be considered too subjective to have any bearing on others, making them appear invalid (Ayton et al., 2023). This carefully designed research study has been robustly documented and designed to consider the weight of such claims. This chapter now explores the tensions associated with phenomenological studies, demonstrating how they are considered within the study.

### **3.9. Phenomenological Tensions**

Critics of phenomenology (Newton, 1988; Paley, 1998) point out the many ways to construct and conduct phenomenological research, particularly Husserlian-based research (Dennett, 2018; Smith et al., 2022). However, as phenomenology concerns novel research that considers the individual participant's experiences, a one-size-fits-all approach could be challenging to negotiate. The researcher has clarified why she has chosen the aspects of the SPA used in this research. The researcher was mindful of the research's uniqueness and was rigorous in her attitude. Arguments have been raised against qualitative research all too often, and phenomenology in particular, so it requires thorough and transparent data collection and analysis. Questions have also been raised about the reliability, replicability, and transferability of phenomenological data results (Madill et al., 2000), yet Smith (2011) has countered the argument around generalisability and replicability by pointing out that quantitative criteria should not be applied to qualitative studies. The individuality of the results should not be considered a negative; they enable a subjective individual perspective of the experiences of a given phenomenon, albeit they may be untransferable to a broader context.

Some phenomenological research appears to be founded on uncertain principles due to researchers referencing second-generation translations of the original German texts of both Husserl and Heidegger (Park Lala & Kinsella, 2011). Second-generation referencing may occur due to the complexities of engaging with or an unwillingness to understand Husserl or Heidegger's work and the philosophical traditions required by a phenomenological approach (Paley, 1997). These traditions have resulted in researchers quoting secondary sources such as the different schools of phenomenology (e.g. "The Duquesne School") rather than engaging with and citing the texts from Husserl or Heidegger (Cohen & Omery, 1994). The situation may be further complicated by both Heidegger and Husserl's language choices, both of whom used words in common usage but altered their narrative meaning (Crotty, 2015); see, for example, Heidegger's (2010) use of the word *Da-sein* (above) and Husserl's (1970) use of the word *Intentionality* discussed below. The researcher has been mindful of engaging with first-generation translations of both Husserl (1970; 1983; 2001; 2013a; 2013b) and Heidegger (1971; 1977; 1996; 2010) to understand and interpret their philosophical methods and, in this way, present research that will adequately encompass their traditions and worth, albeit, in a synergistic phenomenological manner similar to that of Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022). The fusion of phenomenological viewpoints (Aguas, 2022) has been deliberately conceived to understand better the participants' *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970).

Husserlian *Transcendental* phenomenology is founded on the *Epoché* and *Reduction*, which is the suspension of that that the researcher knows to enable a profound comprehension of the participant's experiences, understandings, and knowledge of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1960). In contrast, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is focused on an ontological questioning of reality (Lavery, 2003) and the *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010). Hermeneutics refers to uncovering and interpreting the phenomenon's concealed meanings within the participants' *Lebenswelt*. Phenomenological hermeneutics enables the researcher

to understand how experiences “shape ordinary everyday practices” (Oerther, 2020, p. 293) based on Dilthey’s (1833-1911) methodology, which was concerned with understanding another’s experiences within their *Lebenswelt*. The term hermeneutic is derived from the messenger to the Greek Gods, Hermes, and in this research, the researcher is acting in Hermes’ role and reporting the participants’ voices accurately. Hermeneutic discovery is associated with interpretive research as the participants interpret the phenomenon and the related means, whereby they describe their *Lebenswelt* to the researcher who “faithfully reports” it (Gioia, 2020, p. 24).

It should be noted that Husserl’s initial works did not mention the *Epoché*; it manifested over some time (Balaban, 2002; Tymieniecka, 2003) along with the *Reduction*, which itself was first presented in a series of lectures sometime between 1905 and 1917 and was consequently later defined (Boehm, 1965). Perhaps Husserl took time to reflect, refine, and improve his concept as he became more proficient in it, and consequently, both the *Epoché* and *Reduction* evolved. Therefore, phenomenology was and is now a transformational methodology that constantly refines and reinvents itself to understand different phenomena better (Tuohy et al., 2013).

Heidegger abandoned the *Epoché* (Meacham, 2013) when he published his seminal work *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger, 1996). Despite him being a mentee of Husserl and having spent considerable time performing the *Epoché* (Jones, 1975), Heidegger argued that the *Epoché* was impossible, as the researcher’s prior experiences should become *Fore-structures* of understanding (Heidegger et al., 2010) which can then be utilised to attribute the necessary meanings to the participant’s experiences of the phenomenon. The *Fore-structure* enables the researcher to interpret the data, and it must be acknowledged that interpretive research may not exist without the researcher’s influence (Heidegger et al., 2010).

Nearly 100 years after the publication of *Sein und Zeit* (1927), there remains confusion surrounding phenomenological research paradigms, with Groenewald (2016) stating that the researcher and their prior knowledge cannot be differentiated from each other, suggesting it is wrong to advocate that they can. Groenewald (2004) continued his argument by pointing out that researchers have experiential known facts affecting the researcher's interpretation of the data, which must be acknowledged. Vagle and Hofness (2016), added to the debate that the researcher could not wholly distance themselves from the phenomenological observations, demonstrating the central role played by the phenomenological researcher.

As a result of the split between Husserl and Heidegger, researchers have been manoeuvred into positing their research with Husserlian or Heideggerian traditions, depending on which is perceived as the best fit or alignment to the research question, and this division continues its ramifications throughout phenomenological research. For example, some phenomenological studies separate introspection from phenomenology (Fuchs, 2015; Thomasson, 2003), while other phenomenological studies have used introspection and reflection (Depraz et al., 2003; Horgan, 2011); although Husserl separated his method from a psychological consideration of the self (Husserl, 1922) both he and Heidegger utilised introspection. Husserl insisted that reflection was an essential component of phenomenology as it is in reflection that the *Reduction* can take place (Husserl, 1970, p. 457). The ramifications of the split between Husserl and Heidegger linger on in the phenomenological research with two prolific phenomenological contributors engaged in an unfortunate public discourse. Van Manen's essay (2017a) questioned whether Smith's IPA could be classified as phenomenology, resulting in Smith's subsequent rebuttal of van Manen's critique (2018). Such discourse is unfortunate and creates further divisions within the phenomenological research community.

This discussion has demonstrated many ways to conduct phenomenological research; some follow a more prescriptive prescribed route, and some develop interpretations of methods to develop new phenomenological theories, such as that of Mortari et al. (2023) and this research study. Phenomenology, which appears flexible, able to interpret and be interpreted; the fused middle ground, which suspends known beliefs in the data gathering and interpreting but draws on available evidence for conclusions (Frechette et al., 2020) is the route of this thesis and the SPA it adopted. The participants revealed the phenomenon concerning its significance to themselves; the researcher uncovered it to reveal new understandings that fuse the contemporary with what is already known (Rodgers, 2005), drawing on the researchers' prior knowledge to interpret the phenomenon (Dibley et al., 2020). The preceding paragraphs have explored some tensions surrounding the phenomenological research method and clarified the route this study has chosen and the reasons for doing so.

The relevant ontology and epistemologies used in this study will now be discussed, and the advantages and disadvantages of various aspects of the two perspectives will be considered.

### **3.10. Ontological and Epistemological Perspectives**

Heidegger declared that ontology should be considered reserved for phenomenological enquiry, which is explicitly devoted to the meaning and understanding of *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010). A critical relativist approach considers many realities utilising a deductivist discourse to deconstruct conversations to understand social interactions whilst objectively observing the relationship between cause and effect (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Critical realism acknowledges many ways of constructing and understanding the world. It uses qualitative interpretive approaches to understand alternative subjective



positions. For example, right or wrong can vary according to the current situation and the prevailing societal norms. Knowledge is, therefore, relative to the context and the time within societal concepts.

A subjective interpretation of all phenomena, including language, is the demand of critical relativists. This research employed a qualitative approach based on a relativist ontology that acknowledged the variances in another's reality (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Finlay, 1998; Finlay & Evans, 2009). It was not assumed that everyone would have an identical response to the research questions, as the researcher understood that each participant would have a unique reaction to the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). However, during its rigorous inquiry, it drew parallels. It highlighted any similarities that aligned with the stated aim of discovering the individual participant's truths, giving rise to data that could apply to other students with emotionally intelligent tutors in a VLE (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005).

A relativist ontology is essential in research focussing on a novel experience to align the investigation with an appropriate ontological approach. This qualitative phenomenological research used a relativist ontology to understand the reality of the participants' lives. Relativist research acknowledges that it is not easy to know the nature of another's existence but makes comparisons that can be understood; it is helpful as it enables us to begin empathising with and understand another's reality (Crotty, 2015). This thesis will now explore the epistemological stance that was used. It acknowledges what the participants believe about their reality. It recognises that as humans are social creatures, there may be multiple realities in operation (Crotty, 2015).

Phenomenology in its purest form is epistemology, and Husserl's intent was evident when he said, "all of philosophy depends on epistemology" (Husserl et al., 1950, p. 174) and

later in his work “no epistemology without phenomenology” (Husserl et al., 1950, p. 217). Phenomenology is an interpretive epistemology as it considers the participants’ experiences and does not look to find a universal truth or transferability. Knowledge is constructed through signs and culturally ordered arbitrary rules of significance (Inglis, 2018), and each individual may be aware of general knowledge but will also have distinct subjective knowledge known only to themselves as a result of their way of being in the world (*Da-sein*). In this way, phenomenology seeks to understand the individual’s subjective knowledge of their world.

This research employed a relativist ontology in its qualitative phenomenological stance and was constructivist in its epistemology, as it aimed to build knowledge around the phenomenon of students recognising and valuing their Tutors’ EI levels (Finlay, 1998). Constructivism acknowledges that humans engage with events or things in their world and understand them (Crotty, 2015). Constructivist perspectives come from an understanding that all that is known is equal in significance, with no more emphasis on scientific reasoning than non-scientific reasoning, a tacit understanding that several types of reason serve different purposes (Crotty, 2015) and a constructivist epistemology that can be utilised as the basis on which knowledge may be built. Simultaneously, this research is both interpretivist and constructivist as it is based on a Heideggerian (1996) philosophy, which acknowledges that humans construct meaning from what is already known to them (Given, 2008), and interpretist research focuses on the participants’ beliefs. The interpretivist paradigm acknowledges that social constructs such as language, shared meanings, and instruments allow access to another’s reality (Lichtman, 2023). This research recognises that the researcher is not detached or objective but involved and subjective (Crotty, 2015). The researcher was the primary tool of the study as she both generated the data and then subjected it to her analysis (McLeod, 2017); during this process, the researcher maintained an open

mind that was receptive to another's viewpoint throughout the data collection and analysis process (Smith et al., 2022).

Husserl demanded that phenomenologist researchers set aside previous habits of thought to travel beyond the mental blockages that prevented them from understanding the phenomenon (1970). The researcher must *Epoché* all their current knowledge around the phenomenon (Himanka, 2019; van Manen, 2016a). Husserl's transcendental stance acknowledges that the prior knowledge the researcher knows cannot be unknown; instead, the researcher knowingly generates data without preconceived or critical thought or recourse to that which is previously known by the researcher (van Manen, 2016b). A qualitative approach to research incorporating phenomenology also uses contextualism to make meanings. Contextualist research posits the research firmly within designated parameters and focuses detailed attention on the area studied (Turley et al., 2018). In this way, contextualist research makes meanings from what is learned.

In conclusion, this relativist phenomenological research was interpretivist, constructivist, and contextualistic in its epistemological stance. Concurrent with the ontology, epistemology and theoretical approaches used, the phenomenological notion of *Intentionality* was also utilised, which is now discussed.

### **3.10.1 *Intentionality***

Husserl (1970) described being humanly conscious of something (perceiving, thinking, or daydreaming about it) as *Intentionality* and said this *Intentionality* always appertained to phenomena themselves as subjects and objects are inherently connected by the thoughts themselves as phenomena. One may think of a thing that can exist as a separate object, and what presents to our conscious state is not oneself or the thing but the embodiment of the understanding of what the thing means to us individually. Conscious

thoughts reveal something separate from both the subject and the object, and this is the phenomenon that is revealed by conscious thought.

Husserl understood that *Intentionality* was at the heart of phenomenology. He employed his notion of *Intentionality* (Husserl, 1970) to describe how humans make and ascribe meanings to their world (Duranti, 2009). *Intentionality* is said to direct all mental states (for example, joy), as the state of being joyful is representative of *Intentionality* (Morrison, 1970). Mental states can be projected onto something that may or may not have a physical condition or presence, so thinking becomes ‘thinking something,’ which is *Intentionality* (Husserl, 2012a). The thinking process confirms that the thinking subject and the object of thought are joined by *Intentionality* (Willis, 2001). The individual’s conscious knowledge is where their perceptions of the *Thing* (the phenomenon’s *Essence* (Husserl, 2012a)) reside. Therefore, the phenomenon is not visible in itself (Heidegger et al., 2010); it requires the researcher’s *Intentionality* to reveal it (Husserl, 1970).

*Da-sein* (the tool of the research- “What does it mean to experience this phenomenon?”) (Heidegger et al., 2010) allows *Intentionality* to be present in a conscious state. An individual’s knowledge of a *Thing* results from their experience of the phenomenon, and their knowledge is both personal and subjective. The knowledge about the phenomenon is presented to the researcher, who can only access what the participant has intentionally and subjectively revealed (Crotty, 2015). In phenomenological research, epistemology is built on *Intentionality* to reveal conscious thoughts. Nonetheless, in day-to-day living, human beings are generally too caught up in living to be aware that through *Intentionality*, they have given meanings to Others or actual or imagined objects or happenings that are their own unique perspectives (Duranti, 2010).

The primary focus of a phenomenological methodology is on the experience of how the world appears to the participants using their *Intentionality* (Husserl, 1970).

Phenomenological *Intentionality* refers to being consciously aware of something, for example, an object or an emotional state. In this thesis, the participants' *Intentionality* (consciousness) was focused on their perceptions of the tutor's EI and the relationship between the tutor's EI and themselves. *Intentionality* is a fundamental aspect of Phenomenology, and the researcher's examination of the participant's *Lebenswelt* was to discover the *Essence* of the phenomenon (Dahlberg et al., 2008) by focusing on the participant's interpretation of reality utilising the phenomenological tools of the *Epoché* and *Reduction* (Husserl, 2013a).

Phenomenology emphasises the meaning of an experience for a small group of individuals and considers their individualistic experiences; it particularly highlights previously unexplored phenomena (Groenewald, 2016), which is the purpose of this thesis, to investigate currently unknown student perceptions of their tutor's EI. The small sample was directed to use their *Intentionality* (Husserl, 1970) during the descriptive semi-structured interview process to allow the researcher to discover the significance of students being aware of and placing a value on their tutor's EI. The data was analysed by considering the individual's experiences and answering the research question utilising *Zu den Sachen selbst* (Husserl, 2013b, p. 168).

Having described how fundamental the researcher is to the phenomenological study; the researcher's specific role is now addressed.

### **3.11. The Role of the Researcher**

The researcher's role is discussed to illuminate the practices she employed in this study. Qualitative research relies on the skillset of the researcher, and phenomenological

research requires the researcher to elicit data from the participants as they engage in a discourse about the phenomenon (Collins & Cooper, 2014). At the same time, the researcher must be mindful not to influence how the participants view the phenomenon through the interview discourse or misrepresent the participants in the data write-up, presentation, or analysis.

The researcher must carefully consider building a rapport with each participant to enable them to relax and feel comfortable enough to share their experiences of the phenomenon while being mindful of practices that accept an imbalance of power within the relationship between researcher and participant (Collins & Cooper, 2014). The power struggle should be viewed as a delicately balanced dance between the researcher and the participants, as the power lies with the participants as they share the phenomenon's experiences, although they may view the researcher as being in a position of power. In this research, the researcher considered the participants to be co-collaborators in constructing knowledge about the phenomenon (Oakley, 1993, 2015) and was careful to create relationships where the participants had an equal balance of power.

During the research process, the researcher was required to abandon her assumptions and prior experiences before the data collection. This a posteriori knowledge had to be *Bracketed* deliberately for the researcher to become, in a Husserlian manner, receptive towards the participants' experiences as though they were novel to her (Butler, 2016). The *Bracketing* took the form of reflective writing in the researcher's journal. Initially, they took the form of short notes about what the researcher understood about emotional intelligence and her views about EI tutors and included her deepening understanding of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology (see Appendices K- P, S and T). These notes were revisited reflexively throughout the research, and further passages were added. A reflexive attitude was

adopted to avoid bias when talking to the participants and reflecting on the research data. In this way, the researcher abandoned her *Natural Attitude* (Husserl, 1983) towards the phenomenon, and the focus of the data collection and analysis became that of the participants' *Natural Attitudes*.

Husserlian phenomenology focuses on the *Lebenswelt* and the inherent givenness in bringing the phenomena into view. Heideggerian phenomenology divulges what *In-der-Welt-sein* (*Being-in-the-world*) means to the participants, describing phenomena as *Sein* (*Being*) and advocating that to understand *Sein*, it must be closely observed and considered in a phenomenological way (Heidegger et al., 2010). *Sein*'s phenomenological consideration is necessary as Heidegger et al. (2010) maintained that what is revealed is not the whole phenomenon. Some parts may be hidden, unknown, or *Vergessenheit* (forgotten or concealed unintentionally), and only through interpretation can *Sein* finally be grasped and understood. The researcher's role is both generator and interpreter of the data and, therefore, the remover of the *Vergessenheit* and revealer of the *Sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010).

Qualitative research depends on the researcher's emotional maturity and interpersonal skills to generate the data by listening to the participants' stories as they describe the phenomenon (Collins & Cooper, 2014). For the researcher to reveal the interpretive understanding, it was necessary to consider the previously unencountered literature. The introduction of the literature after the analysis enabled the hermeneutic cycle to be achieved, whereby the researcher moved backwards and forwards from the data to the literature (Watts, 2013) to complete her understanding of the data and what it meant for the participants to experience being tutored by an emotionally intelligent tutor in a VLE. This hermeneutic circle is one of understanding and "is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move: it is the expression of the existential *Fore-structure* of *Da-sein* itself" (Heidegger

et al., 2010, p. 153). Interpretive phenomenology may be considered doubly hermeneutic “as the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening” within the phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 41); this is demonstrated in Figure 3 below, which shows the participant embedded in their natural way of being in their world and striving to understand *Being* whilst simultaneously the researcher aims to understand their perceptions of their understanding.

*Figure 3: The Double Hermeneutic Circle of Understanding*

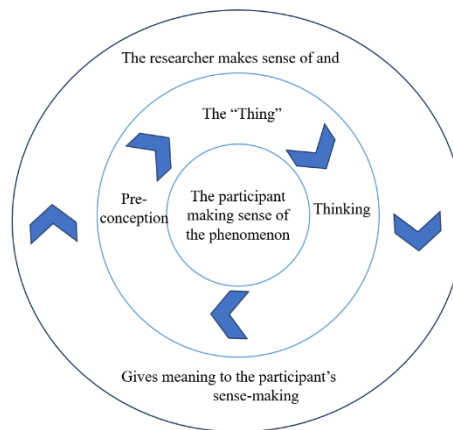


Figure 3 conveys the fluid back and forth between the participants, the data, the researcher, and reflexivity, which grounds this research in the phenomenological paradigm and highlights its difference in approach from traditional non-phenomenological studies. The hermeneutic circle of understanding (Dibley et al., 2020) enabled the researcher to move between the newly identified and their pre-existing knowledge to deepen their understanding, utilising Heidegger’s (2010) concept of *Da-sein* to consider the connectedness between the researcher, the literature, the data and the participants. This movement of understanding had a transformational effect on the researcher as she assimilated and strove to understand the realities of the participants’ experiences (Jacobs, 2013).



The reflective cycle of understanding is initiated by acknowledging that one is already ‘There’ in the world, which incorporates the Heideggerian notion of “*Geworfenheit*” (*Thrownness into the world*) (Heidegger et al., 2010, p. 12), whereby the researcher removed herself from her known reality and engaged in reflection. The *Natural Attitude* of one’s way of being in the world is to be unreflective, but it is in reflection that the interpretive process can begin as human cognisance enables *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) to be hermeneutically understood (Edralin, 2017). Empathetic comprehension is more significant than a cursory objective understanding; it is the ability to feel something akin to what an Other has experienced. *Fore-structure* and understanding of the researcher are, therefore, fundamental to the phenomenological interpretation of the data. However, the researcher was mindful of the need to maintain the participants’ voices throughout this research and was conscious of the need to keep herself and her views aside. As a result, the researcher decided to ensure that her voice was not heard in this study to avoid contaminating or losing the crucial participants’ voices.

Having discussed the specific role of the researcher in this phenomenological research study and the aspects of the methodological approach adopted to answer the research questions, this thesis now details the researcher’s positionality.

### ***3.11.1 The Researcher’s Positionality***

The researcher became interested in tutor EI following discussions with her supervisor. As a student herself, she was fully aware of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic was having on educational practices. The researcher could see the potential impact of emotionally intelligent tutors on students in VLEs and was curious to find out if her fellow students could perceive such an impact or place a value on it. Being a student at the university since 2014, the researcher has witnessed many technological changes and had to

move to online instruction whilst being aware that some tutors seemed to have managed the transition to online teaching better than others. The researcher was curious to understand what may have made the transition to online teaching easier for some and if this had impacted their students. The researcher hoped this study's results might positively affect future online students by meaningfully affecting tutor practices and influencing higher education institutions (HEIs) responsible for initial teacher training and ongoing professional tutor self-development.

### **3.12. Summary of Part One of the Methodology**

This section of Chapter Three has discussed the methodological approach chosen to answer the research questions and carefully align the research study to a synergistic phenomenology, which gives equal deference to both the Husserlian and Heideggerian branches of phenomenology. The tensions surrounding the qualitative paradigm were explored before the epistemological and ontological perspectives were discussed. Finally, the section closed with an evaluation of the researcher's positionality and specific role in this research.

Part Two of the Methodology Chapter, the Methodology Design, now details the practical route the research adopted to answer the research questions.

### **3.13. Part Two of the Methodology: The Research Design**

Part two of the Methodology, The Research Design, discusses the ethical principles that guided the research study. It includes the selection of the tutor-gatekeeper on whose emotional intelligence the research study was based, the sample, the pilot study, and the data collection method. There follows the conduct of the interviews and a description of the data analysis. Ensuring validity and reliability and the process of journalling kept by the researcher brings the chapter to the summary.

### **3.14. Ethical considerations**

This section outlines the ethical procedures followed to safeguard the participants and their identities and the careful handling, storage, and retrieval of the data, which will be destroyed after the research is completed. It also discusses the steps taken to ensure the security of the participants' private details.

The ethics surrounding this research were carefully considered, and the researcher took care to closely follow the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024) and the University of Huddersfield research and ethical guidelines throughout the study. The University of Huddersfield granted permission to conduct the research before the investigation commenced. (See Appendix A for duplicates of all the relevant university ethical forms appertaining to the study.) The researcher contacted the students directly via email and included a letter of information (Appendix B and C), which included details about the research, the researcher's contact details, the outcome of the information they would provide and what participation in the study involved. Interested students who responded to the initial email were invited to participate in the study and were sent consent to participate forms (Appendix D) and a questionnaire to introduce them to the topic of EI (Appendices F and G), which was done as a response to the pilot study (see section 3.17 below).

At each point of contact with the participants, the researcher reminded them they could withdraw at any time from the research, as per the BERA (2024) participant guidelines. In line with the current data protection policy, all participant information and signed sheets were stored in a password-encrypted manner to preserve the anonymity of the participants per GDPR (2024) guidelines. To maintain her anonymity, the tutor was referred to throughout the research as the tutor, and the student participants were referred to in the number order in which their interviews took place i-v. (See Table 3 for details of the participants' pseudonyms.) In the interview extracts used within this study, all the participants' names and places mentioned by the participants have been anonymised using asterisks thus- \*\*\*\*.

Although the researcher and the participants were all students at the same university in the North of England, COVID-19 restrictions still impacted face-to-face meetings. As a result, all the interviews took place online using Microsoft Teams and were held individually so each participant could privately explore the phenomenon. There are limitations to online interviews, such as familiarity with the chosen platform and the requirement for both parties to have high-speed internet access (Chiumento et al., 2018). However, there were no alternatives for conducting the interviews at that time. The participants were accustomed to the Teams platform and indicated that their internet access would be sufficient to cope with the chosen format. All the participants engaged in the interviews in their homes. They were reminded to select a quiet room and part of the day where they could speak freely without interruptions, which is an essential facet of online research (Chiumento et al., 2018). The beginning of each interview consisted of the researcher reminding the participants what they had said about their understanding of E.I. in their survey responses and asking permission for the interview to be recorded and transcribed as a further aspect of the informed consent they had previously consented to (Anabo et al., 2019). The research purpose was stated, and each participant was allowed to ask questions before being asked if they were still happy to

participate. The Teams platform was also used to audio record each interview. The recordings were then uploaded into the University Cloud and password-protected to deny anyone else access to them, following guidance from the Government on data protection (GDPR, 2024).

After each interview, the participants were asked if they could be contacted for follow-up information as required. The participants were reminded that they would be sent the transcripts of their interviews so they could read the sections intended for use if they wished. Member checking is an external method of validity that is optional to phenomenological studies (van Manen, 2016a). However, to validate the accuracy of the transcription, the participants were asked to check that the transcript of their interview accurately represented what had been said. Each interview was given a code, and care was taken to ensure each was anonymised per B.E.R.A. (2024) guidelines. The transcribed interviews were password-protected and uploaded into the University Cloud via Microsoft One Drive to deny unauthorised access and to follow GDPR's (2024) current best practice guidance. All the participants were contacted after the initial transcription and coding and invited to read the parts of the transcripts of their interviews that could be used. Four participants (Participants ii, iii, iv and v) agreed that the transcripts were a truthful and accurate record of what had been said during their interview.) Participant i did not respond, possibly as by that time she was no longer in the UK)

Having discussed the appropriate measures taken to safeguard the participants' confidential information and to ensure an ethical stance was maintained throughout the study, this thesis examines the selection of the tutor whose EI became the focus of the participants' interviews.

### **3.15. The Selection of the Tutor**

The previously done MSCEIT assessment (see 2.5) ensured that the tutor's abilities aligned with the research, which required a tutor to exhibit EI capabilities. Thus, the researcher was confident the students had been taught in online sessions by an emotionally intelligent tutor as assessed by the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2003). The female tutor was a mature and very experienced HE tutor who had worked at the university for many years. The tutor was re-approached and asked if they were happy to confirm they would allow their students to participate, and when they agreed, they were asked to draw up a list of all the students taught online in the previous term.

Having ascertained who, the tutor would be the list of their students was required to populate the sample. The following section discusses the sample recruitment.

### **3.16. Recruiting The Sample**

This section introduces the underlying principles behind selecting the sample. It begins by discussing the misalignment of the term sample within phenomenological studies (van Manen, 2016b) and explains the use and meaning of the term in this research. It then introduces the alignment of the sample within phenomenological research and discusses the inclusion criteria for eligibility into the study.

Van Manen critiqued the word sample concerning phenomenological enquiry and suggested that the term was not a good fit as it implied a notion that the sample had an empirical link to a population, which could then be used to generalise the results. He suggested using the word "example" (van Manen, 2016b, p. 353), and he reminded phenomenologists to seek experientially rich data sources and be explicit about the nature of the sample. The researcher was mindful of his caveat, but for ease of writing and

understanding, she used the term sample, albeit with a phenomenological approach and knowledge of the meaning it conveys.

In line with phenomenological research practices, this research utilised a sample of five participants to ensure that an in-depth and contextual data stream was collected (Smith, 2011). The sampling was purposive to garner information about the phenomenon being studied (Smith, 2011). This research study used a small, purposefully chosen sample, which aligned the research closely to a phenomenological perspective (van Manen, 2016b). The sample was drawn from students in the School of Education and Professional Development at a university in the North of England who had studied Education Courses under the direction of the tutor chosen above. The participants' eligibility inclusion criteria were that they had studied online in a VLE during the preceding term of the research, with the tutor who was the gatekeeper (Cohen & Abedallah, 2015). The sample all identified as female; this is indicative of the prevailing educational workforce as according to the UK Government's statistics for the school workforce in England for the year of this study (2021/2022), 75.7% were female (D.f E., 2023), so it is not surprising that a small sample of educational students would be comprised only of females.

Phenomenological research relies on individuals who have lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation, so the sample cannot be random. Two sampling designs are most associated with phenomenology: Purposive and Snowball. This research employed both designs. The initial sample was purposive (Campbell et al., 2020; Merriam & Grenier, 2019), homogenous, and non-probabilistic (Gobo, 2013), incorporating predetermined criteria for inclusion (Patton, 2015) as the selected participants were required to have all been taught by a tutor who was categorised as emotionally intelligent to share their *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) of experiencing the phenomenon. The researcher deliberately selected the sample participants

as they shared the characteristics of being a student of an emotionally intelligent tutor who had been taught in an online setting. A further participant was recruited to the sample by Snowball (Gobo, 2013; Patton, 2015) when one participant recommended a fellow student from the cohort who was included in the invitation to participate in the study but had not initially responded. The sample was both illustrative and strategic (Patton, 2015) in its goal of creating and sharing knowledge about the phenomenon of students being taught in virtual online lessons by an emotionally intelligent tutor. The study participants had similar *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) experiences to deliver the rich data required for the descriptive and interpretive SPA that this thesis utilised to illuminate the complexities of the phenomenon as experienced and described by the participants.

Having discussed the principles behind the sample, this study now considers the recruitment of the participants.

### ***3.16.1 Participant Recruitment***

This section discusses recruiting the participants who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were eligible to contribute to the research. It details how the participants were approached and gives pertinent information regarding each participant. It concludes by investigating the suitable number of participants for a qualitative phenomenological study.

After speaking to the tutor, four eligible class cohorts, A, B, C, and D (see Table 3), were initially identified. Nevertheless, in the study, cohort D had no representative student participants. The potential population was sixty-nine. These four classes comprised the total number of students taught by the tutor in the previous term online. The tutor needed input into who could be included in the invitation to participate, as all the students were unknown to the researcher before the research. To maintain participant anonymity, the researcher did



not reveal to the tutor the number of students participating or the names of those who had agreed to participate.

The potential student population was contacted individually via email (see Appendix B) and invited to participate in the research. It was realistically envisioned that approximately five to ten out of the potential population of students could be included in the research, aligning it to the smaller but richer data stream required for phenomenological studies (Robinson & Smith, 2010). Unfortunately, time became a factor as one cohort was about to complete their studies and were at the end of their coursework and, therefore, less readily available (D); hence, no participants were from cohort D. One group had embarked on their dissertation work, and many were too engrossed in their research to participate. All the students were slow to respond to the invitation to participate; seven participants initially responded, one failed to respond further, and one decided to withdraw. Four participants were self-enrolled (i, ii, iii, and iv), and one (participant v) was snowball sampled (Gobo, 2013; Patton, 2015) by Participant iii, giving a sample size of five ( $n = 5$ ). Three participants were from the same cohort, C, which was advantageous as they would eventually discuss the same lesson sessions, albeit from different perspectives. See Table 3 for further relevant participant information.

*Table 1: Participant Biographies*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Identifies as female</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>UK or International</b>	<b>Previous EI knowledge</b>	<b>Group cohort</b>
i	Yes	20-30	International	No	A
ii	Yes	20-30	UK	No	B
iii	Yes	30-40	International	No	C
iv	Yes	50-60	UK	Yes	C
v	Yes	40-50	UK	Yes	C
					D (None)

Due to the students being slow to volunteer, the research commenced with four volunteers, i, ii, iii, and iv; Participant v completed the sample of five four weeks later. Once the participants had agreed to join the study, further emails with consent forms, more information about the research and the researcher's contact details were sent to each participant (see Appendix B and C).

Having five participants allowed the researcher to analyse the data in detail, enabling scrutiny and revealing common or divergent themes. It was apparent after speaking to the fifth participant that similar words, themes, or phrases were used by all the participants in their exploration of the effects of the tutor's emotional intelligence upon themselves, so a degree of saturation of the data had been achieved. Nevertheless, as phenomenology is equally concerned with the singular experience (Smith et al., 2022), data saturation is not required. However, the goal is to reach a point where no new insights can be gleaned from the participants (Leavy, 2014). In the same way, it must also be acknowledged that some data was not repeated as it was particular to a given participant (van Manen, 2016b).

The phenomenological focus of the research was to create a reflective text with sufficient detailed first-hand accounts to explore and understand the phenomenon of students experiencing their tutor's EI levels and their perceived impact on themselves. This research study focuses on the students' lived experiences, their perceptions of their tutors' emotional intelligence levels, and the effect this has had on them. The primary consideration is a phenomenological viewpoint, and it actively considers singular occurrences that may have the potential for broader applications to other students in similar situations (Smith et al., 2022). Phenomenological research focuses on the details of the individual participant; it does not look to make generalisations as research concerned with number-driven data does (van Manen, 2016b). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the participants may have had

experiences that other students in a VLE could potentially find relatable and that other tutors may wish to emulate the tutor in this research study.

Phenomenological studies focus on in-depth data analysis, enabling comparisons within the data subsets and considering divergent themes. For this reason, participant numbers are kept low (Smith et al., 2022). At the same time, smaller samples also stop the individual data from being lost in the whole corpus of the analysis (Robinson & Smith, 2010). The number of participants in phenomenological research is an issue that has been the subject of some scrutiny, with estimates of the participants required varying from Smith et al. (2022) and Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) advocating three, and Morse's assertion (1994, p. 225) that six are needed to Creswell (2013) claiming that between five and 25 is the ideal number. Further information on research numbers for homogeneous samples was given by Guest et al. (2016), who suggested that 6-12 participants will allow data saturation if they share similar characteristics. In this research, the students' similarities include the following:

- Being taught by the same tutor whose EI level had been assessed,
- Had participated in online classes and were
- Studying in the same year (2021/22) during the ongoing pandemic

The illustrative sample (Patton, 2015) consisted of full-time students whose disclosed ages ranged from their early twenties to mid-fifties. Thus, the sample indicated the lived experience of typical female students (Gibbs, 2018) who had experienced being taught in a virtual learning environment (VLE) with a tutor with a demonstrably elevated EI level. The tutor, participants, and researcher all identified as female; thus, within this thesis, the pronouns she and her have been used when discussing the actors involved in the study.

This section has emphasised the need for the sample to be small, with each participant having experienced the phenomenon in question and contributing to an experientially rich

data stream (Smith et al., 2022). This section also revealed that the actors in this research all identified as female, and the following section discusses the impact femininity had on the research.

### **3.17. The Accidental Female Gaze**

Gender was not a particular driver or focus of understanding for the researcher. Gender became a factor because everyone connected to the study identified as female. Thus, the tutor-gatekeeper (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016), sample and researcher worked together to understand the *Da-Sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) of what it means to be in the *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) of a female student of an emotionally intelligent female tutor. In this way, a female understanding was incorporated but it was not purposefully included in the design of the study. However, a feminist perspective is one in which the collaborative construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participants is vital (Fraser & Taylor, 2020; Oakley, 1993, 2015) and this was included as a result of the female actors in the study. The goal of this construction of knowledge was the sharing of information in a non-hierarchical manner as possible, which Oakley (2015, p. 209) termed a “Gift Relationship,” and which enabled the participants to have the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher freely. In this manner, the notions that a researcher is just a data-gathering tool and the participants are merely data-generating devices were removed (Oakley, 1993).

Feminist research practices have long been linked to qualitative approaches, particularly those involving interviews as the data collection method (Allan, 2022). Oakley’s work (1993, 2015) challenged interview methods, which were a limited one-way process whereby the researcher gathered data without responding to it and encouraged feminist interview methods, which are considerate and mutual and focus on meanings, inclusion and experiences within a

particular context. They do so by exposing the mechanisms of participation by which shared knowledge is achieved (Skeggs, 2008).

Feminist perspectives may be considered a good alignment for phenomenological research, as feminist phenomenology contemplates how meaning-making structures are constructed and analyses how cultural norms shape perception and understanding (Young, 2005). Phenomenology considers these cultural norms or normativity as being experiences as lived. The perceived world of the individual is constantly being reconfigured and adapted as a result of what is chosen to view, how they choose to view it, the importance ascribed to what has been seen and the sense the individual then makes of it (Al-Saji, 2017). Feminist phenomenology focuses on the discourse that reveals social subjectivity and how the meaning of oneself within the normative understandings is revealed through lived phenomena (Zeiler, 2020). This study acknowledges the importance of such feminist values; however, they were influences within the study rather than a part of purposeful design planning.

This section has highlighted the inclusion criteria for the participants and discussed the accidental female gaze and the reasons for including it. This thesis now considers the pilot study conducted to evaluate the research strategy.

### **3.18. The Pilot Study**

The findings from the pilot study and how they affected the research study are considered in this section. Before the interviews commenced, a pilot interview was conducted with a volunteer student from a different university whose results did not form part of the data corpus (Bernard, 2013). The pilot included all the forms used with the participants (see Appendices B, C, D, F and G) and the interview protocol (Appendix H). The interview schedule was developed, refined, and updated through a reflective process, initially due to the

pilot study but also following each interview (see Appendix H additions in blue indicate additions after the pilot and in brown denote additions as the interviews progressed).

The discussion with the pilot volunteer was stilted and did not produce the anticipated rich data. Further questioning revealed that the volunteer needed clarification on what the concept of E.I. could include. As a result, the researcher contacted the participants (Appendix E) and asked what emotional intelligence meant to them; three participants (i, ii and iii) were unaware of the concept of EI. The decision was made after reflecting on the possible outcome on the data quality if the participants were unsure of the topic for discussion, to send some limited information about emotional intelligence to each participant before the interview and to engage in conversation with each participant about the different areas emotional intelligence could embrace (see Appendices F and G). This information included a questionnaire to facilitate the participants' understanding. They were asked to consider other areas that could fall under the heading of ability EI. Therefore, extra time was allowed before the beginning of each interview began. This time was spent discussing aspects of EI, the different areas it encompassed, and their thoughts; before discussing the terms, the participants felt it encompassed their understanding of experiencing and recognising their perceptions of their tutor's E.I. The researcher amended the interview protocol, changing the order of the questions and re-introducing the information about aspects of the E.I. sheet the participants had filled in.

Following the pilot study and the subsequent amendments, the interviews began, which are now discussed in the following data collection section.

### **3.19. Data Collection**

This section discusses the data collection method in detail. Phenomenology is a reflective methodology that encourages the participants' introspection and *Intentionality*

(Husserl, 1970) of their lived experience to discover the new and unique (Given, 2008). Phenomenological qualitative research produces data by describing the phenomenon (Stones, 1986) and commonly incorporates the spoken word as the data generator in interviews (Crotty, 2015). This research included semi-structured interviews of sufficient length to enable the participants to explore the phenomenon and their reaction to it in-depth (Høffding & Martiny, 2016; Smith, 2011) and to allow the researcher to capture their *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970). Interviews, specifically the phenomenological interview, have been shown to be a reliable approach (Høffding et al., 2022) to data generating and were specifically picked as the data generating device to align this research study with its phenomenological objectives utilising the researcher as the tool to do so (Thomas, 2021). The phenomenological interview is one in which the researcher and the interviewee become “collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity” (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 2002, p. 354).

Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to understand how the participants experienced their tutor’s EI and the significance of the impact of that EI. The approach focused on a narrative description of the participants’ lived lives and did not evaluate various hypotheses (Leavy, 2014). It investigated the participants’ *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) to discover how they had experienced the tutors’ EI. The interviews were not intentionally kept the same, although each one was approached in an open and receptive manner as being able to reveal something new about the phenomenon (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

As a point of reference at the beginning of each interview, the participants were given information about the purpose of the research (Appendix C) and the working definition that the study utilised to describe the attributes of EI under investigation, the identification of emotions in oneself and others, the self-management of emotional states and the ability to

enable others to do the same (Vaida & Opre, 2014). The guidelines for the questions can be seen in the Appendix (see H-Interview Schedule).

The interviews were recorded before being transcribed and analysed to identify the major themes. Phenomenological research demands in-depth submersion in the data by the researcher, or the analysis may be accused of being superficial (Crotty, 2015). This research's results will better understand tutors' EI and its significance for their students.

Phenomenology utilises the consciousness of the researcher and their interpretation skills to understand the *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) of another (the participant) and enable previously unknown phenomena to be observed and understood (Suddick et al., 2020).

Phenomenological research discovers the truth behind the participant's evidential beliefs (Steup, 2018). It investigates and seeks to understand another's lived experiences (Smith et al., 2022) within the phenomenon in question (Willis et al., 2016).

Having described the data collection method, the following section details how the interviews were conducted.

### ***3.19.1 The Conduct of the Interviews***

The conduct of the interviews is discussed in this section. The researcher was aware that the participants were unsure of what the term EI could encompass and, at the same time, was mindful of the three distinct kinds of EI (trait, ability and mixed). It was necessary to ensure that the participants were engaged in discussing the ability EI qualities of the tutor implicated in the research. The participants had all experienced the phenomenon of having an emotionally intelligent online tutor without necessarily being aware of doing so or giving conscious thought to the subject. The researcher went through the answers provided by the respondents to the Participant Emotional Intelligence Information Sheet and Questionnaire (see Appendices F and G) to remind them of the intended areas for discussion. This aide



memoir was used so the participants would understand and be aware of the topic before the interview began.

During the interview, the participants were encouraged to use their terminology to describe their experiences. By reminding the participants of the areas under discussion, the researcher could be sure the participants were able to participate in the interview and contribute meaningful data. Such guidance was necessary as three participants had no prior knowledge of the construct of EI. Their data needed to be relevant to the discussion; using each participant's prior responses may be viewed negatively as an attempt to influence the participants and introduce bias. However, the discussion focused on the terminology the participants had previously used to describe how they experienced the tutor's EI in the online classroom. To contribute meaningfully to the research, the participants needed to speak freely and in-depth about the phenomenon they had experienced at the heart of the study, using their prior terminology to facilitate their discussion. Husserlian transcendental phenomenological research demands the researcher to be as much of a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) (Duschinsky, 2012) as possible so that through the *Epoché* and *Bracketing* (Husserl, 1931) and the researcher's *Intentionality*, the *Essence* of the phenomenon may be revealed (Balaban, 2002; Husserl, 1970, 2012b).

Interviews with participants with first-hand knowledge of the phenomenon are the basis of phenomenological research (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Each semi-structured interview lasted for approximately an hour. The data collection incorporated various questioning techniques, allowing the participants to consider, explore and describe their lived experiences. The questions encouraged explanatory answers to deliver "a stream of information about something the interviewee knows well and is interested in" (Grbich, 1999, p. 104). A semi-structured interview schedule enabled the researcher to share in the discovery

of the participants' emotions, feelings and thoughts surrounding the phenomenon through the spoken word to disclose the *Essence* (Husserl, 2012a). It allowed both the participants and the researcher the opportunity to actively engage in the dialogue (Lincoln & Guba, 2016).

An interview protocol (Appendix H) was drawn up using the research questions to inform the semi-structured interviews (Smith et al., 2022); this was amended as the interviews progressed, as the researcher felt different points needed further clarification. However, as the interviews were conversational, the researcher deviated from the schedule, asking relevant questions when it was pertinent to follow the participant's thought processes. Therefore, the participants' lived experiences were revealed during the interview (Gibbs, 2018) using an open dialogue (Galletta, 2013). The semi-structured interviews allowed for meaningful and relevant conversations during which the researcher pursued significant responses and adapted the discussion to follow essential lines of inquiry revealed by the participants (Galletta, 2013; Smith et al., 2022, p. 23). The multi-faceted consideration facilitated the researcher to interpret the varied perspectives the participants revealed (Smith et al., 2022) to co-construct knowledge around the phenomenon whose emphasis was focused on meanings, inclusion and experiences within the context of being taught in a VLE by an emotionally intelligent tutor (Skeggs, 2008). Following each interview, the data was listened to many times and transcribed verbatim before being analysed.

The steps detailing the analysis follow in the next section.

### **3.20. Data Analysis**

This section explains how the phenomenologic analysis was conducted. The analysis began after each interview, and the data analysis principles adhered to throughout this process are described. Data extracts are included to show initial and further transcription and the

formation of the *Essence* (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015) codes or themes that were revealed in the data (Dickie, 2003).

During the data analysis process, the participants' unique voices are used to find transferability that may apply to others in similar situations (Crotty, 2015). Thus, phenomenology is the most basic research method (Staiti, 2016) as it considers the data in an unbiased and open manner and critically yet openly considers the phenomenon.

Phenomenology aims to increase the knowledge of phenomena or human involvements about which little is known. It may employ the description of the phenomenon and an interpretive understanding of the same (Finlay & Evans, 2009; Smith et al., 2022). Phenomenology uses “*zu den Sachen selbst*” (Husserl, 2013b, p. 168) to discover the *Natural Attitudes* of the participants within their *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970). The primary focus of phenomenology is to comprehend the reality of another's experiences and is embodied through an in-depth analysis of their viewpoint. The research focus was the participants' lived experience, and the question asked was fundamental: What is it like to experience this phenomenon? (van Manen, 2017b).

After the data was collected, the researcher began transcribing the data. The transcription aimed to identify the meaning or *Essence* (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015) in the data and commenced with listening to the recording repeatedly and making initial notes. The note-taking was followed by closely watching the interviews to see where the participants looked unsure or most comfortable and aligning this with their spoken words. The researcher became familiar with the participants' speech patterns' peculiarities as time passed. Two of the participants (i and iii) were international students. One had parents who were not UK nationals (ii). Hence, the researcher was careful to listen to their spoken words often to hear the inflexion of their voices. The researcher then transcribed the recorded interviews, checking for nuances in the

conversation and ensuring that none of the data was unintentionally omitted. The researcher carefully included spoken, hesitancy, and grammatical errors to preserve the authenticity of the participants' words. Transcribing involves many decisions about the content to contain or exclude from the script, and it is important not to misrepresent or misinterpret what the participant has said (Bailey, 2008). The transcript of the data had many cross-checks between the aural and written data to empathise with the participant's viewpoint, as there is no substitute for understanding (Watts, 2013).

The following extract from Participant v shows how the interview was transcribed verbatim, including pauses (indicated by ellipses) and repetition.

She certainly came across... well... I felt that she seemed... well, seemed... consistently the same with her manner and her attitude and just being consistent. Consistently reliable... really. Emotionally as well... uh... you know, and it's the same person every week, you know... and yeah... like I say yes (laughs). I... I found... found it helped me to feel secure there. (iv)

Data extracts used in the final analysis and subsequently reproduced in this thesis retained any repetition, including punctuation for ease of reading and field notes like laughing (in brackets), which were added to help convey the meanings. Here is the above exact quotation formatted for use in this thesis:

She certainly came across, well, I felt that she seemed, well, consistently the same with her manner and attitude and just being consistent. Consistently reliable, really, emotionally as well. Uh, you know and, and it's the same person every week, you know. And yeah, like I say yes, (laughs) I, I found, I found it helped me to feel secure there. (iv)

Once the transcription of each interview was done, the data could be coded, and an initial interpretation was added using Watts' (2013) descriptive and interpretive coding method. Each transcript was coded and analysed separately to identify themes, with the initial analysis based on Watts's (2013) method. Watts suggests that the emphasis should not be on blind adherence to any given method but on the researcher's skills, understanding, and knowledge of the phenomenon (Watts, 2013). Whilst not slavishly following any prescribed route (Spinelli, 2005), steps to analyse the data phenomenologically included:

- The data analysis was done with an attitude of phenomenological *Reduction*, that is, stepping back from the researcher's already known or believed to be known understanding (Husserl, 1970). To facilitate her *Reduction*, the researcher considered her own experiences as a student and was careful to distance herself from these to be open to hearing and understanding the words of the participants.
- The reduction is first made possible by the *Epoché* (Husserl, 2012a), whereby the researcher suspends their beliefs, assumptions, and ways of considering things (Spinelli, 2005).
- *Bracketing* is whereby the researcher sets aside what pre-conceived bias is known to them (Husserl, 2012a). In the *Reduction*, attention is paid to how the participants experienced the phenomenon, facilitated by the researcher becoming open-minded (Watts, 2013).
- The focus is on the phenomena or the *Things* and the *Essences* themselves (Husserl, 2012a). Husserl claimed that *Intentionality* (Husserl, 1970) makes the phenomena possible, which is how phenomenology operates on a hermeneutic level (Ihde, 2012).

The data was re-read to establish the "first-person perspective" (Watts, 2013, p. 5), and emergent concepts defined by the researcher were established (Ritchie, 2014). Watts's

(2013, p5) “what/how” system was used to understand the data, as the research goal was the participant’s perspective of the phenomenon. What refers to the question “What is being spoken about here?” and delivers a descriptive theme. The descriptive theme is followed by the how question, which asks, “How does the participant understand this point they are talking about?” These questions are systematically applied to the corpus of the data to reveal the themes within (see Table 4) by specifying phenomenological goals that describe the phenomena and choosing the domain for both inclusion and exclusion (Ihde, 2012). The researcher was careful to equalise or horizontalise the phenomena. At this point in the analysis, all things are equal and appear how they appear (Spinelli, 2005). Ihde suggests that researchers ask themselves, “What do you see here?” (2012, p. 20). Each participant’s voice deserves equal consideration. Ihde (2012) instructs phenomenologists to address the phenomena as they appear and describe them but not explain them.

Watts’ (2013) method links the descriptive explanation of the spoken words to the interpretive understanding of the meanings behind the words, and this is demonstrated in Table 4, where the exact quotation used above has been inserted into the descriptive/analytical grid for comparison.

*Table 2: To Show the Links Between the Spoken Word, the Descriptive and Interpretive Analyses Based on Watts’ (2013) Descriptive/Analytic Method of Analysis*

<b>Descriptive</b>	<b>Quotation</b>	<b>Analytic</b>
Combination of self-regulating and social skills	She certainly came across, well, I felt that she seemed, well seemed, consistently the same with her manner and her attitude and just being consistent. Consistently reliable, really, emotionally as well. Uh, you know and, and it’s the same person every week, you know. And yeah, like I say yes, (laughs) I, I found, I found it helped me to feel secure there. (iv) (4t)	The participant understood that the tutor’s EI was linked to her even temper and ability to control her emotions at every session. Her repetition of ‘consistently’ indicates her emphasis that the tutor could be depended on to be in control of herself. Her laugh was self-deprecating and suggested that a calm tutor helped her (and possibly others?) to settle into the sessions.

A further example showing how the researcher used colour to begin understanding the data's themes is shown in the Appendix (see Appendices N and O). The theme development process was based on the requirement to supply sufficient evidence from the data to build robust evolving codes (Braun & Clarke, 2021) that accurately depicted the phenomenon. Across-interview descriptive themes were then used to construct and combine the emergent themes and to identify sub-themes, and representative exemplars were selected (Appendix P). The selection of exemplars was made to show the participants' views of the phenomenon via a purposive sample of the data (Watts, 2013), being careful to keep the aim of identifying the *Essence* (Husserl, 2012a); to enable this, the researcher highlighted the participants' words and phrases in the analysis. Major themes began to emerge after many cross-checks, converging into significant collections of meaning, which Creswell and Poth (2018) argue is a crucial step in analysing data.

Following the literature review, the interpretive element of engaging with the data analysis began (Finlay, 2011). For the researcher to understand what had been said and to be able to contextualise how it was being delivered, the researcher's *Fore-structure* (prior understanding) (Heidegger et al., 2010) allowed for the accurate interpretation of the data as interpretive research cannot exist without the influence of the researcher. Utilising *Da-sein*, the researcher considered the *Natural Attitudes* of the participants, removing their *Vergenessheit* (Heidegger et al., 2010) to enable the co-construction of understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon of being a student of an emotionally intelligent tutor to take place. The sympathetic synthesis of the participants' voices was done to reveal the phenomena whilst representing their meanings (Finlay, 2011) and included the researcher's considered "informed commentary" (Morse, 2003, p. 892).

This section has carefully detailed the steps taken to perform the data write-up and analysis; the following section discusses the criteria appropriate for assessing this research study.

### **3.21. Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability and Trustworthiness of the Study**

This section details the criteria to ensure the study's findings are credible and accurate. Lincoln and Guba (2016) suggested that the criteria by which quantitative studies were assessed, namely reliability, validity, generalisability, and objectivity, were not appropriate for qualitative studies. They indicated that credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability could be used to give parity and align the two research methods and that the general term trustworthiness was appropriate to validate qualitative research and enhance rigour in the study.

Credibility in phenomenological research requires a prolonged engagement with the data to allow the researcher to comprehend the phenomenon from the participant's point of view. In this study, the member checking strengthened the trustworthiness of the research; the participants did not validate the study or its findings, but they acknowledged the accuracy of the transcription and the chosen texts (King et al., 2008). The participants were allowed to read the texts selected as potentially earmarked for use in the study and invited to comment on or change them to make them more accurately represent their experiences if they wished (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). Thus, capturing the exact voices of the participants increases the truth of the work and adds to its credibility.

Dependability relies on a clear audit trail such that others may replicate the research process. The researcher has carefully documented the steps taken to navigate the phenomenological journey through the research, and an audit trail in the form of academic journals exists that charts the steps taken to produce this synergistic phenomenological



approach study. Additionally, frequent discussions were had with the researcher's supervisory team to walk through the steps taken and ensure the decisions were theoretically grounded.

Transferability of the phenomenologically grounded findings is permissible in a way that generalisability is not. As such, suggestions have been made in the concluding chapter on how the findings may apply to others whilst being mindful that the research is inextricably linked to the students in this research study. While this thesis does not intend to attempt to suggest that all female, HE students studying in a VLE with an EI tutor will have the same experiences, the findings could resonate with other students, and other tutors may find a commonality with the tutor in this study.

Confirmability relates to the data and the truthful and accurate interpretation by the researcher, whose goal was to maintain the integrity of the data without introducing bias. The participants' voices have been presented accurately to enable others to verify the themes within the data, although others may well use their foreknowledge to arrive at different understandings. Nevertheless, the audit trail of participants' voices and elucidated analysis allude to the study's confirmability.

The trustworthiness and integrity of the research were increased by the researcher's reflexivity and constant attention to the *Epoché* and *Bracketing* in the data presentation chapter and by her careful immersion in the data in the analysis chapter. To enable the researcher to conduct these dual roles, she engaged in journalling both her thoughts and feelings and notes on her encounters with the literature and how this challenged her thinking. The following section reveals more insights into how the researcher employed her reflexive practices via journaling.

### 3.21.1 *Journaling*

Journaling to keep an “audit trail” (Jasper, 2005, p. 247) was an integral part of the researcher’s reflexivity process, taking the form of handwritten paper notes in bound books, and this process is detailed in this section. The journals formed a private record of the researcher’s journey and were not intended for public scrutiny, yet several pages have been included in the Appendix (see Appendices I to Q), detailed below to indicate the variety of journal entries written throughout the research. The need for the researcher to engage in *Reduction* (Husserl, 1970) encouraged the researcher to engage in journaling to embrace her subjectivity around the topic (Appendices I and J) and document her knowledge of emotional intelligence to *Bracket* it (Husserl, 1931).

The researcher’s subjectivity may not be considered in isolation from her experiential-driven viewpoints or understandings. It must be considered relative to her world (Zahavi, 2011). The journaling became a way to dig deeper into the researcher’s thought processes as she used it in an immersive way to gather and marshal her thoughts and uncover how the data was understood (Meyer & Willis, 2019). In this way, she incorporated bridling (Stutey et al., 2020) as a reflective and ongoing practice to maintain an open mind towards the phenomenon whilst considering and acknowledging what was already known to the researcher. Journalling was used to contain the untidiness and clutter of the research (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018) both on the researcher’s desk and in her mind. It was used to explore the concept of using a harmonised synergistic phenomenology. Journalling ultimately led to constructing the unique approach adopted in this thesis (Appendix M) and understanding the two phenomenological schools of thought used in synthesising this research study (Appendices K and L). Later, the journals were used to know where the data and the literature aligned or were disparate (Appendix Q) and to remind herself of essential practices in phenomenological research, such as the need to maintain the participants’ voices (Appendix R). The journalling, including the

questions and decisions made throughout her thesis journey, enabled the researcher to make sense and meaning from the sometimes-abstract concepts and provided a safe place to consider the impact of her emotional response to the research as it progressed (Meyer, 2014).

Having described how the researcher's journaling enabled her reflective practices, this chapter now closes with a summary of Chapter Three.

### **3.22. Summary of Chapter Three, the Methodology and Method**

This research study employed a unique qualitative hermeneutic interpretive synthesised phenomenological perspective (Finlay, 2012; Vandenberg, 1997), using a relational-centred approach to consider the dynamic between the participants and their tutor while acknowledging the dynamic between the participants and the researcher (Finlay & Evans, 2009). It utilised a critical relativist ontology and incorporated interpretivist and constructionist epistemologies. It considered the impact of the participants' *Intentionality* (Husserl, 1970) as it directed them towards uncovering the forgottenness of the phenomenon. The small, purposefully selected sample was invited to consider their *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) as they co-collaborated (Oakley, 2015) in generating knowledge about the phenomenon via semi-structured interviews. The researcher was a central figure in the study responsible as the research instrument, developing the data through semi-structured interviews and then analysing it, always mindful of the "*things themselves*" (Husserl, 2013b, p. 168).

The research's focus was the students' descriptions of their online experiences and the reality of being a student of an emotionally intelligent tutor. The data was collected and analysed before the literature review was conducted, using the phenomenological stance adopted throughout the research to ensure that the researcher maintained their "tabula rasa" (blank slate) (Duschinsky, 2012). Furthermore, in this phenomenological research, the

researcher kept an open mind free from preconceived notions about the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994) to consider the participants' experiences from their perspectives (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). The researcher's *Reduction* (Husserl, 1970) was maintained by reflective journal entries, which left an "audit trail" (Jasper, 2005, p. 247) and improved the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

This study harmonised two strands of the phenomenological approaches (Aguas, 2022), adopting a transcendental (Husserl, 1931) approach to gathering, describing and presenting the data and, following the literature review, a hermeneutic (Heidegger et al., 2010) stance to interpret and discuss the data. The study, therefore, employed a synergistic phenomenological approach to deliver data that was understood and described from the participants' perspectives but discussed regarding the relevant literature. The research explored the *Essence* (Husserl, 2012a) as revealed by the participants but situated this in the context of the literature. The data analysis revealed seven significant areas of interest, which are now presented and discussed in Chapter Four.

## 4. Chapter Four: Data Presentation and Description

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings within a phenomenological transcendental narrative. An explanation is given of how the themes were separated in the data and the seven areas of discussion that resulted from the analysis. The participants' words to describe an emotionally intelligent tutor are explored in detail, and these words are then linked into superordinate and subordinate themes. The themes were put into context using short and longer data extracts to illustrate the points made. The participants' points of view regarding the tutor's emotional intelligence (EI) level and, subsequently, the impact that this had on their studies are clarified before a conclusion summarising the data presentation closes the chapter.

### 4.2. Understanding the Themes in the Data

This chapter presents the data and incorporates extracts that illustrate the participants' experiences as they considered and recognised the attributes of an emotionally intelligent tutor. The findings were developed into emergent themes and comprised superordinate and subordinate themes (Smith et al., 2022). The themes were separated during the analysis, yet they are related and could be placed within different superordinate groupings by other researchers to reflect their understanding of the participants' experiences and the phenomenon's *Essence* (Husserl, 2012a). The various themes are discussed within the narrative account. The analysis preserved the integrity of the participants' voices, which aligned with the phenomenological approach taken throughout this research. It began by considering the words the participants chose to describe their tutor's EI (Watts, 2013). The participants' comments began the hermeneutic circle of understanding the phenomenon (Laverly, 2003) through the meanings they ascribed to those words.

This section contains transcript extracts presented in the participant's words as quotations, which were the basis for the phenomenological interpretation (Zahavi, 2019). The excerpts are presented to illustrate how the interpretations were developed. The quotations have been used proportionately wherever possible to ensure everyone's voice can be heard and to acknowledge the participant's individual and unique viewpoints (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). However, the qualitative approach to sampling has aimed to ensure the quality of the chosen samples. Each sample was selected for its ability to be insightful and its capacity to contribute to the knowledge around the phenomenon. The sample extracts illuminate the phenomenon from the participants' viewpoint, and the analysis aims to "go beyond description of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2016, p. 93).

The focus of phenomenology is the individualist account (Husserl, 1970). This research highlights the convergence between participants' views and illuminates singular voices (Smith et al., 2022) to support any claims made. Thus, both depth and breadth are investigated. These findings will be discussed under seven headings:

- The participants' words for describing aspects of the tutor's EI.
- Encouraging others to understand their feelings.
- Building interpersonal relationships and using social skills to demonstrate being self-aware.
- Being approachable by being self-regulating.
- Showing an interest in another's welfare and perceiving another's emotions.
- The participants' views of the tutor's EI.
- The tutor's EI's impact on themselves and their final grade.

### 4.3. The Participants' Words for Describing Aspects of the Tutor's Emotional Intelligence

The initial focus of the analysis was on the individual words each participant chose to use to describe distinct aspects of their tutor's EI. The students were discussing the same tutor and her abilities in the virtual learning environment (VLE), so many of the participants' descriptors were similar or had similar meanings, which may be considered as helping to reinforce and strengthen the findings. This focus of attention on the participant's words was done in alignment with Husserl's phenomenological attitude used to understand the phenomena fully by which "we must go back to the things themselves" (Husserl, 2013b). This philosophical stance is built on a relativist ontology to understand the many ways humans construct their worlds and a constructivist epistemology to build knowledge of the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2018), and these perspectives are the basis for all the phenomenological interpretations of the data.

The following section begins by examining the language participants used to describe the tutor's emotionally intelligent attributes. This is followed by a discussion that uses participant quotations to establish the context in which their meanings were situated. Each subsequent section concludes with extended quotations, illustrating the complexity of participants' interpretations and the implications they associated with their chosen words when describing their experience of having an emotionally intelligent online tutor.

The participants are interchangeably referred to as students in this text for ease of readability, and each participant identifier (i, ii, iii, iv or v) is included in brackets after each quote. Where the participants have used their or the tutor's name, this has been anonymised using \*\*\*\*\* in the quotations. The researcher added extra words in italics within the quotes to enable understanding, but these do not form part of what was said in the interviews. The data

is presented as it was said to maintain the participants' voices, so it includes repetition. The headers used in each section use direct quotations from the participants.

#### **4.3.1 *Encouragement "In A Funny Time"***

The participants highlighted the aspects of EI that they felt were important. Through their descriptors, they all perceived that their tutor had different emotionally intelligent attributes and described these in their own words. However, each participant referred to the tutor's encouragement of the students and all their endeavours. The tutor encouraged the students to be active learners in their sessions together. Each participant emphasised how their tutor had inspired them to contribute actively to the online classroom, with three (i, iv and v) using the word encouragement. For some participants, the module was the first online module they had participated in, and this 'new-to-them' method of delivery in a time of meaningful change due to the COVID-19 pandemic made the students feel apprehensive. Participant v, referring to studying during the pandemic, said, "It's been such a funny time, hasn't it?" Participant iv also indicated the general situation's uniqueness and the difficulties experienced by students studying online. Nonetheless, she stressed that the tutor noticed and rewarded her efforts to participate in the sessions when she said:

I've got quite a lot of encouragement from \*\*\*\*\* and quite a lot of praise. (iv)

Participant iv used 'quite a lot' twice to describe both the support and the encouragement the tutor gave her; this indicates she recognised the impact of the tutor's actions and conveys how vital the motivation and the praise were to her. Participant i explored the influence of the tutor encouraging the students to ask questions and compared it to the potential outcome of not having her questions answered. Participant i explained how asking questions helped her thought processes and facilitated a deeper understanding of the topic when the tutor urged the



students to ask questions; she described a circle of learning whereby having questions answered enabled her to comprehend a topic and explore it in detail:

It's encouraging someone to ask more questions so *(they)* want to get more clarified about things. So, I feel it's helpful because if my lecturer isn't giving me answers, I won't ask more questions, and then I get limited to ideas that should come to me. (i)

Participant v offered a more straightforward explanation by stating that her tutor's support prompted her to produce her highest quality written work. Using the word encourage twice indicates how important this aspect of an emotionally intelligent tutor was for her:

She supported and encouraged me to do my best. And she was very encouraging. (v)

Whereas Participant ii explained how the tutor encouraged everyone to participate as much as they were able to by stating:

She made sure everyone was involved in it. (ii)

Participant iii explained how the tutor had encouraged her when she found the module particularly challenging and appreciated that the tutor had tried to reassure her that she could complete the work:

Put my mind at ease, and she said, you'll get it. You'll do it. (iii)

Discussing the impact of the tutor's encouragement, Participant i commented that she had found the tutor gave constructive feedback in their sessions, which were her first post-graduate module. She commented on how helpful the feedback given to her had been, not only applying it to her other post-graduate modules but still using it as she completed her master's thesis:

I took the feedback into my other modules and my other classes, and I'm still using the feedback today. (i)

Participant ii also mentioned receiving positive feedback during the session. She responded to the tutor's praise and felt included and valuable. The positive feedback enabled the student's participation and encouraged her to be involved in the discussions and feel that she had valid points to add to them:

It made me feel more like part of the team and to make me feel more confident. (ii)

Participant ii describes her fellow students as a 'team' and then makes the point that her tutor's help allowed her to access the team and become a valid member, indicating that she had felt excluded until her tutor's intervention. Participant ii mentioned teams more than once, which is explored in greater detail in the discussion in Chapter Six.

#### ***4.3.2 Building Relationships Based on "Affinity"***

The participants highlighted how the tutor co-built relationships with them all. One way the tutor did this was to praise them for raising valid points in discussions. Participant ii noticed that it was not just herself that was receiving praise and that the tutor included everyone in the class, building a relationship with each student:

But she was really good at building good relationships with everyone. (ii)

Participant iv agreed and commented that she felt both "welcomed and included" by the tutor in every session. Participant iv stated that an aspect of the tutor's EI was revealed when the group discussed various aspects of their dissertation. The tutor shared that she had had similar experiences with the students, making her seem less remote "because she had an affinity" (iv) with them.

#### **4.3.3 *Being “Genuinely” Approachable by Being Self-regulating and Empathetic***

The participants revealed that the tutor had shared that she had, as a student, had similar experiences to those that the students were undergoing, and this sharing removed some of the barriers to learning the students had been anticipating. It made the tutor seem more like one of them and, therefore, more approachable. Participant iv expanded on this theme by saying:

You have got to have an approachable and coherent tutor. (iv)

Participant v felt the tutor supported her and the other students, commenting that:

She was genuine and genuinely interested and obviously genuinely wanted you to do well. (v)

Participant v identified the need for mutual regard between the student and the tutor, their impact on the student, and their engagement with the module. The emphasis on the word genuine repeated three times could indicate how significant this potential aspect of the tutor's EI was to her and how she had recognised this. It could also imply that the tutor had consistently appeared genuine to the student, whilst simultaneously, it could indicate that the student appreciated the tutor's encouragement and concern.

#### **4.3.4 *Having “Connections” with the Students, an Interest in their Welfare and Perceiving their Emotions***

All the participants mentioned the warmth and friendliness of the tutor, who put them at ease early into the module. The tutor instructed all the student participants on either their first master's level module or their last undergraduate module. Participant iii said she felt under much pressure at the beginning of the module and “wanted to do really well” but was relieved that the tutor “just simplified it, made it easier” (iii). Participant iv reiterated this when she said:

Her consistency, approachableness and encouragement made me believe I could get it.

(iv)

Participant v compared the tutor to another with whom she had not built a rapport, resulting in her disengagement from a module and less participation during those sessions. Participant iv had subsequently struggled to complete that module and did not want to reach out to the other tutor for help; she demonstrated her frustration with being unable to build a working relationship with the other tutor when she added:

You can find yourself becoming disengaged when you can't connect. You feel they can't be bothered; I can't be bothered. (v)

During the interviews, participants i and ii shared how they demonstrated their EI as Participant i explained, 'like we would maybe frame our question differently' (ii) to ensure their points and questions were clear and concise. However, there were occasions when the tutor misunderstood, and the flow of information became confusing. Participant ii continued:

I feel like sometimes, maybe, she might have misunderstood.

We might have phrased it in a way that she might not have understood it properly.

So, then, we may be phrased our question differently just to clarify something we have not described properly. (ii)

The students rephrased their points, and the tutor would elaborate on the topic of the discussion until the students grasped the concept. All the participants reiterated the need to understand the lecture and to be understood when they made a point or asked a question. The participants mentioned that the tutor cared that they comprehended the class and were active participants in the lecture and explained that:

She cares about that we understood that we're following the lecture. (i)

The students described how they felt at ease with the tutor to the extent that they could “even look forward to asking the questions” (iv), knowing their discussions would elaborate on their knowledge and increase their understanding of the concept. The students seemed secure in the knowledge that their questions would be answered as in every session, they were reassured that the tutor could be depended on to have:

Her consistency of her attitude, of her nature, of her emotion, the reliability of her consistency (iv)

Participant iv continued the theme by adding, “We got the same \*\*\*\* every time.” (iv). Participant iv’s repetition of the word “consistency” suggests how dependable the tutor was and how Participant v found this desirable and was reassured by these facets of the tutor’s EI during the COVID-19 pandemic. Having an apparently emotionally independent tutor in a time of momentous change had become an important weekly event for her; she explained:

It was quite nice, really, to have those regular Tuesday meetings. (iv)

It has been shown that the participants experienced the phenomenon of having an emotionally intelligent tutor and recognised and identified this in numerous ways. They appreciated their tutor’s encouragement during a ‘funny time,’ particularly in inspiring them to participate in the online sessions and to seek clarification on topics they were unsure about by encouraging them to ask questions. The students valued her praise when they raised valid points and her personalised direct feedback. The participants highly appreciated the tutor’s ability to build a relationship with each student based on empathy and understanding of what it means to be a student.

The participants described and discussed how they felt included and shared an affinity with her, and this was apparent in the friendly way the participants expressed their sessions together. They talked about the tutor’s approachability and appreciated that she cared about

them and that they understood the topic of their online sessions. At the same time, having connections with the tutor who had built a rapport with them and displayed constancy, and the moderation of her emotions enabled the students to relax and participate freely. The participants knew their tutor would be approachable and emotionally stable at every session and looked forward to the weekly lecture. These findings are all discussed and scrutinised in Chapter Six, which draws on the literature review to frame the analysis. This chapter now moves on to the students' words and phrases used to build the superordinate and subordinate themes used in the remainder of this chapter.

#### **4.4. Superordinate and Subordinate Themes in the Data**

This chapter has considered the words and phrases the participants used to describe the tutor's EI and establish their significance. This thesis now places those words and phrases into context to identify the aspects of EI the participants understood to be synonymous with the tutor's EI. The methodology chapter detailed how "phenomenological reflection" (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was used to understand and identify the significant statements in the text that were analysed to illuminate and reveal the superordinate themes. Four superordinate themes within the participants' words were revealed during the interpretive analysis: 'encouragement,' 'interpersonal relationships,' 'approachability,' and 'an interest in others.' Each of the four superordinate themes comprises three subordinate themes presented in Table 5 below.

*Table 3: To Show the Links Between the Superordinate and Subordinate Themes*

<b>Superordinate Themes</b>	<b>Related Subordinate Themes</b>
Encouragement	Rapport
	Clarification
	Empathy
Interpersonal relationships	Active listening
	Inclusivity
	Building relationships
Approachability	Adaptability
	Self-regulation
	Conflict management
Interested in others	Eye contact
	Reading non-verbal cues
	Voice modulation

Each subordinate theme is introduced as the individual components of the superordinate and is discussed in turn. Each section includes a table showing which participants had perceived they had experienced each subordinate theme. Quotations are used, building up to a concluding paragraph where longer quotations enable the context in which they were said to be understood, along with the in-depth analysis.

#### 4.5. The Participants Recognise the Tutor's Encouragement of Others as an Aspect of Emotional Intelligence

This superordinate theme identifies the concepts of the tutor encouraging the students and understanding the students' feelings and how this was conveyed to them. This theme captures the importance the participants placed on experiencing the tutor's ongoing encouragement. The participants felt relieved that the tutor understood how difficult they thought the module would be and did her best to remove as many obstacles as possible. The three related subordinate themes (rapport, clarification, empathy) and prevalence among the participants are detailed in Table 6 below and then discussed.

*Table 6: To Show the Subordinate Themes Linked to Encouraging the Students and Understanding their Feelings*

Subordinate theme	Participant i	Participant ii	Participant iii	Participant iv	Participant v
Rapport	✓			✓	✓
Clarification	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Empathy			✓	✓	✓

##### 4.5.1 Building a "Rapport" with the Students

The students described how the tutor tried to understand what it meant to be a student and demonstrated her desire to build a rapport with them, knowing each cohort member as an individual. One way in which the tutor did this was explained by Participant i, who recalled her surprise that the tutor remembered her name from the first session:

I came into class for the first time, and she got my name; I'm like, 'Oh, you remember!' She was able to identify me from the first day she saw me. (i)



Participant i indicates how vital she felt it was to be identified as a unique group member and demonstrates the foundations the tutor used to build a rapport with each student. Participant v also talked about the connection she shared with the tutor:

I think we built a relationship, and I think we had a rapport; she was genuine. (v)

She uses a questioning tone, with her use of ‘I think’ twice, and during the interview, she paused to consider her words before adding, ‘She was genuine.’ Adding this to her earlier phrase implies that their rapport was not falsified or contrived but a genuine expression of how the tutor encouraged all the students despite being in a VLE. The online method of delivery was not, therefore, a barrier to building and maintaining a rapport with each student.

#### ***4.5.2 “Clarifying to Show an Understanding”***

The students explained that the tutor demonstrated an understanding of their feelings by clarifying their points and questions. Participants i and iii described how the tutor frequently defined their words and meanings before answering them:

We make some comments; if it is not clear, she said: ‘Tell me again.’ If she didn’t understand it, then she would ask them to repeat it. (iii)

All the participants agreed that the tutor would always clarify that she understood what the participants were trying to ask before responding to them. The tutor did this by dealing with each question or point with the same gravitas. Participant ii explained the circumstances when the tutor understood from the students’ issues and questions that the students had not grasped the concept and how the tutor backtracked to ensure their comprehension:

But she realised that maybe she didn’t understand it properly.

So then, she went over the content again, which was really good. (ii)

The tutor's EI enabled her to understand and address the lack of comprehension so that the cohort grasped the subject matter. Participant v described how the tutor listened carefully to their points, ensuring she understood and then using those points the students had made to expand all the students' knowledge.

She would repeat what had been said to clarify it to herself and then take that discussion a little bit further, so yes, I know she was definitely, definitely interested.

(v)

Again, we are told that the tutor ensures she has correctly understood the points made by the students by repeating their words back to them and then using them as a springboard to make the debate more meaningful for them. Participant v emphasised that she felt the tutor paid careful attention to what the students said with her repetition of the word 'definitely,' indicating how important it was to her to have a tutor who was interested in the students' points and willing to incorporate their ideas into the topic of discussion. Similarly, Participant v understood that the tutor was clarifying the students' points, ensuring her comprehension of their questions, and encouraging the students to think deeply about the topic under discussion:

I like the way she was good at pausing before answering our words.

You know she would ask questions, more questions to delve deeper. (iv)

The careful way that the tutor responded to their points by asking questions for clarity was appreciated by Participant v. Repeating the word questions and the emphasis on 'more questions' give the impression that Participant v is making the point that this tutor has a particular skill for asking questions, facilitating a deeper understanding of the subject matter. It was clear that the participant benefitted from this aspect of the tutor's EI, indicating that this chance to talk about a topic could deepen her understanding.

### 4.5.3 *“Having an Empathic Nature”*

Participants iii, iv and v discussed the tutor’s empathy towards the students.

Participant iv described how the tutor spent time reassuring the students and encouraging them to believe in their capabilities and described her empathic nature:

I think she was very good at putting people at ease and not letting them start to panic.

I think she was quite good at saying what she found difficult as well and how she had got around things. (iv)

The students described how the tutor utilised her EI to reassure them all and create a calming online persona aimed at helping them work through the module and complete the task. One of the ways she did this was to share hints and tips from her student days. The tutor’s indirect, subtle encouragement indicated that difficulties whilst studying are not unusual and that these barriers can be overcome. Several participants discussed the advice the tutor shared with them from when she was a student. The three mature cohort C students who had to “work full time, and we’ve got families” (v) shared the tutor’s helpful advice and Participant iii explained:

She gave her professional and personal opinion on matters, so it helped me to understand. She simplified it all. I felt so relieved after a few sessions. (iii)

Participant iii appreciated having a tutor willing to share their thoughts about subjects. The tutor’s combination of viewpoints enabled her to comprehend the procedures she needed to apply to her work. Making complex issues seem more straightforward allayed the students’ worries and concerns once the module was underway. The students were apprehensive about starting their module. They appreciated the tutor’s candour about her difficulties during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

I think she showed her empathetic nature because, you know, she was very honest about her own struggles. Whether it was technology or the fact that we were going through the COVID situation, she was quite good at saying what she found difficult as well and how she had got around things. (iv)

Participant iv gave the impression that by being open with the students, getting to know them, and revealing insights into her life, the tutor broke down some barriers to learning that the students had perhaps anticipated. The empathic way she shared details of her struggles and the solutions she found during the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to have motivated Participant v. In this way, the tutor demonstrated her understanding of the students' feelings while inspiring them to achieve their personal best. The tutor achieved this by encouraging the students from their first lecture by building a rapport with them and by constantly clarifying the points made by herself and by them to her. The tutor revealed to the students that she understood their dilemmas and the constraints of combining studies with working and family life:

She was like: 'No, I understand you're busy.' But she would say, 'Try to find some time to just read a chapter or do some writing.' She would never berate us. (v)

The tutor employed many ways to encourage the students to participate in the session and complete the work required for the module. One way was to let the students break the tasks into smaller chunks. Participant v mentioned how the tutor would ask them to focus on only a small goal (as above, to find some time to read a chapter); she indicates a sense of guilt that she should have worked more, perhaps expecting to be criticised for not doing sufficient. However, the tutor chose not to scold the student, thereby possibly absolving participant v. The tutor's empathic nature was also demonstrated to the participants when she indicated that she had been in a similar mental place to them during her studies:

I think that because she had been there, helped. And it was good to know she had had similar thoughts, like when you think, ‘Oh gosh! Why did I even start? I am feeling this, and I am feeling that, and you know, rather than her being surprised and saying, ‘Oh? Are you?’ She can remember when she did it. (iv)

Participant iv pointed out that having a similar experience to the tutor, who had shared stories of their student experiences with the group, humanised the tutor. The tutor understood the difficulties of being a mature part-time student balancing work/home/student life. Despite their remote access to the tutor, the students were experiencing workloads and stressors similar to hers. They were all experiencing the hardships that the COVID-19 pandemic inflicted on the population, which unified the group. Being aware of others feeling the same normalised some of their experiences and allowed them to have an affinity with the tutor. Participant iv revealed some of her worries and uncertainty about her ability to complete the course. Discovering that her tutor had had similar feelings once empowered her to believe in her capabilities. Knowing the tutor appeared unsurprised by her revelations seemed to reassure Participant v and convinced her to continue despite the doubts she had in herself. The participants appreciated that their tutor saw them as individuals:

I got the feeling through feedback, through work that I submitted and drafts that I did, because it amazes me how much marking and how many students that (a) tutor will have, and they actually personalise yours, and they make you think that maybe she does remember me. So yes, that’s how it made me feel. (v)

Participant v was surprised that the tutor had managed to connect personally with her. The tutor’s emotional intelligence appeared to enable her to reach beyond the limitations of the on-screen delivery and know each student so that when they submitted their work, it was

commented on in context, showing that the tutor knew them as individuals, not just one of many students.

The participants acknowledged and discussed how the tutor encouraged them to participate in the online sessions and explore the topic thoroughly. The participants acknowledged the tutor's use of rapport to help them feel at ease in the new-to-them experience of an online classroom. All the students mentioned using clarification to ensure the tutor understood their points and to build on discussions around a concept. The three mature students emphasised the tutor's empathic nature, how having revealed her struggles as a student to them made her seem more aware of and sympathetic to their worries and concerns.

#### **4.6. The Participants Recognise Interpersonal Relationships and Social Skills as**

##### **Aspects of Emotional Intelligence**

This superordinate theme identifies the concept of the tutor using her social skills to build positive relationships with the students. This theme captures the participants' pleasure at the tutor's warmth and the ease with which the tutor built personal relationships with them. It emphasises how the tutor carefully listened to their words and responded appropriately, indicating her constant self-awareness. The three related subordinate themes, active listening, being inclusive and building relationships and their prevalence among the participants are detailed in Table 7 below.

*Table 7: To Show Subordinate Themes Linked to Interpersonal Relationships and Being Self-Aware*

Subordinate theme	Participant i	Participant ii	Participant iii	Participant iv	Participant v
Active listening	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Being inclusive				✓	
Building relationships	✓	✓			

#### **4.6.1 Active Listening Using “A Listening Ear”**

All the participants described the diverse ways the tutor demonstrated that she was actively listening to them throughout the lectures and being aware of them as they joined the online sessions:

She gives a listening ear to those who have just come in. (i)

This phrase, ‘a listening ear’(i), vividly describes the focus of attention of the tutor, attuned to the students’ arrival and alert to both what they said and the manner of delivery. The participants were also aware of her being conscious of and listening to their comments during the lecture and focussing on what they had to say, with ii, iii and iv all reiterating each other:

And she would say things like,

‘That’s a really interesting subject or a really good point that you have raised there.’(iv)

And then, when we would give examples, she would nod her head and she like (*said*), that’s a really good example and then she would like to add on to it. (ii)

She’d let us finish and then discuss it or move on or say, ‘Is anybody else having any similar experiences?’ (iii)

The participants were clear that the tutor's interjections were valuable; they indicated that they needed to hear that their thoughts were relevant to the topic of discussion. The praise she gave to the students was appreciated and appeared to motivate the students to continue to participate in the sessions. The participants also realised that the tutor was thinking about their points and their relevance to the topic and demonstrated this during lectures:

And she was definitely listening. You knew she was listening because she would interject into what had been said. (v)

The participants were clear that the tutor's active listening, which focussed on the points the students wanted to make, expanded upon their suggestions, and included topics for further discussion, was an essential and desirable aspect of the tutor's EI.

#### **4.6.2 *Being "Inclusive to All"***

Participant iv, the most mature participant, talked about how she had noticed the tutor's active listening skills were wide-ranging and included each student in her cohort, ensuring that everyone received the same attention and had similar opportunities to participate in the sessions they shared:

I don't ever recall anybody not feeling included. I felt very included, to be honest. (iv)

Participant iv's use of honest at the end of the sentence reiterates and emphasises how inclusive she found the tutor to be. The tutor treated every student equally and fairly; all the points they wanted to make and questions they wanted to ask were dealt with similarly.

#### **4.6.3 *Building "Social Relationships"***

The participants identified that building positive relationships is integral to a tutor's EI, as demonstrated in the extracts and analysis below from the two youngest participants from cohorts A and B:



But maybe she comes into the class early when we're waiting for others to join. She talks about the family, she talks about herself, and then she gives a listening ear to people who just came in. But she talks about where she likes to go, she tells us she's in \*\*\*\*, and then she keeps (a) listening ear to people who are in the room to maybe talk about where they are or, as I said, the weather, so, I feel that like it was a social relationship, (*we were*) trying to build up interactions. (i)

Yeah, she would like use our name, and you know, ask us about how we were, however, and there was one of the group members, and she wasn't attending like very regularly. But even though she was attending when she did, \*\*\*\* made sure you know, like to build a relationship with her and ask her how are you? Are you all right? And use her name. So, then you know it made her feel more confident as well. (ii)

Participant i described how, as part of helping everyone to settle into the session, the tutor routinely shared vignettes of their everyday activities to help put the students at ease, encouraging student participation at the start of each session by making themselves seem less remote through the sharing of stories about their own daily lives. Participant i talked about how the tutor listened to the students' responses, eliciting answers to enable student engagement and participation. An interpretation of the students' thoughts may be considered that the tutor actively removed the barriers to learning that the students may have experienced due to the online lesson delivery. Participant i understood that the group members were all engaged in a discourse that would enable them to build caring relationships.

Participant ii was conscious that the class was known as individuals to the tutor, who routinely used the students' names when addressing them. This acknowledgement of each student as an individual reveals the caring and empathic nature of the tutor (or the regard the tutor has for the students). The tutor identified a student who was a poor attender and was

careful to boost that student's engagement by referring to them by name and gently including them in the group activities to encourage them to participate regularly in the sessions.

Participant i (from Cohort A) and Participant ii (from Cohort B) acknowledged the time the tutor invested in building a relationship with every member of the class they were in; this demonstrates the tutor's approach to facilitating the student's learning experience and a willingness to encourage student engagement by being engaged themselves.

The participants perceived that the tutor established interpersonal relationships with them in numerous ways. The tutor used her 'listening ear' to focus on what they were saying and used the points they raised in her lectures. Participant v noticed that the tutor was particularly inclusive despite being in an online situation, where being inclusive could be more difficult. Finally, the tutor built a warm relationship with each student, demonstrating her self-awareness as she employed her social skill set to put the students at ease.

#### **4.7. Participants Recognise Being Approachable as an Aspect of Emotional Intelligence**

This superordinate theme identifies the importance the participants ascribed to having a tutor who made themselves available, was persistently open to their questions, and was willing to help them understand their module. This theme captures the fact that the participants revealed that being approachable was essential to the tutor's EI. The three subordinate themes, adaptability, self-regulation and conflict management and their prevalence are shown in Table 8 below.

*Table 8: To Show the Subordinate Themes Linked to Being Approachable by Being Self-Regulating as an Aspect of Approachability*

Subordinate theme	Participant i	Participant ii	Participant iii	Participant iv	Participant v
Adaptability	✓		✓	✓	
Self-regularity		✓		✓	
Conflict management		✓			✓

#### **4.7.1 Being Adaptable and “Giving the Students Space to Think”**

The participants revealed that being adaptable in her lectures was an EI skill they valued in their tutor. The tutor encouraged them to ask questions, and ‘She gives them room to answer questions’ (i). They felt empowered to interrupt the flow of the lecture to raise points and add to the discussions in the session:

But when people asked questions, she would answer them sometimes there and then, but then if there is a load of questions being asked, she would ask us to wait at the end. (iii)

The tutor scheduled the questions, sometimes responding immediately or asking the students to wait for a suitable pause or the end of the session. The participants appreciated the tutor’s willingness to answer their questions, allowing them the opportunity to talk points through until they were understood, even if this meant a lengthy question-and-answer session for her at the end of the lecture:

Maybe she tries to run a session after the class is over, so she tells you

(*That it is for*) those who want to have their questions (*answered*). (i)

Participant iv noticed that not only did the tutor answer their questions but, after talking around the topic with them, the tutor would stretch their understanding further by asking them questions with her replies:

She was adaptable in a sense (*that*) if we felt we were struggling, yes, she would give us suggestions, but they were more in a question form to get us thinking. (iv)

The participants discussed the tutor's approachability concerning answering their questions and the ease they felt enabled to do so, thus revealing that this facet of EI is integral to it. Having a tutor prepared to veer off schedule to ensure the students understand a concept seemed to be particularly important to the participants, especially in an online lecture, where it would perhaps be more straightforward for the tutor to 'deliver a lecture' without pausing and without appearing to notice and highlight the students' lack of comprehension.

#### ***4.7.2 Using Self-regulation to Remain "Consistently Focussed"***

Participants ii (the youngest) and iv (the oldest) highlighted that the tutor could be relied on to self-regulate throughout their lectures and remain absorbed in the lecture with no apparent distractions:

She was really focused on the lecture. (ii)

Just being consistent, consistently reliable, really, emotionally as well. (iv)

Participant iv used 'consistently' to emphasise that the tutor routinely modulated her responses to the students. She continued her theme of considering the reliability of the tutor's emotional state at and during every lecture. Reflecting on how the tutor coped with the demands of delivering her lecture and ensuring the comprehension of the students and how she greeted them in every class:

Oh, my goodness! Well, again, to have that consistency to be able to say

‘Hello, hello! It’s good to see you!’ as you joined in, and there was just that smile. (iv)

Her exclamation shows the emphasis that Participant v felt towards the constancy of the tutor and indicates how essential she considered this aspect of the tutor’s reliability to be. The tutor’s warmth and genuineness in the tutor’s dealings with the students are revealed when Participant v recalls the tutor’s smile and the friendly way in which she describes how the tutor routinely greeted the students.

#### **4.7.3 Managing “Conflict Situations”**

The participants explained that there had been little conflict within most of their sessions. Nevertheless, when different personalities clashed, they were quick to mention the considered ways in which the tutor dealt with situations, minimising both the disruption and their impact:

She managed the situation really well. (ii)

Sometimes, we would get out of hand, and so her voice would change, particularly towards some of the more distracting students. (v)

The participants said the tutor modulated her voice to keep control of the sessions and remind the participants when to refocus on the task, which is a crucial skill in an online classroom situation. The participants considered the tutor to be very approachable and said they could ‘email her anytime and ask her anything’ (iv) and approach her during the lectures:

During the lectures, we would talk about things and have experiences of what she was talking about, and then, like she would always direct us back, and she would join in the conversation. And say like you had made a good comment about something, she would say, ‘yeah that’s really important that’ and stuff like that. You don’t always

know everything, but when you do, it is nice to say something and get some feedback.

(iii)

Such a range of different topics from people and someone might throw something out, and she was adaptable in saying, ‘Well, the limitations could be this; however, on the other hand, (*that*). Be aware of what will be the limitations beyond this. What would be the advantages of this? (iv)

These extracts demonstrate the approachability of the tutor as seen through the eyes of the participants. Participant iii (cohort C) appreciated that the tutor could follow the flow of the conversation among the students when they were having discussions and could guide them to remain focused on the topic. This gentle steering by the tutor enabled the students to contribute and deepen their understanding. The tutor would join their discussions, highlighting the pertinent points they had made. Participant iii realised that the tutor praising her and the students for their relevant contributions to the debate made her feel that her points were noteworthy and valid. Participant iv was aware of the varied topics covered in the sessions, the twists, and turns of the discussions, and how skilfully the tutor wove them together, appreciating that the tutor was enabling and encouraging them to think and develop their critical thinking about the topic.

#### **4.8. The Participants Recognise the Tutor’s Interest in the Student’s Welfare as an Aspect of Emotional Intelligence**

This superordinate theme shows the students’ awareness of the tutor’s perception of their emotions. This theme captures the fact that the participants revealed that being interested in another’s welfare by perceiving another’s emotions was an integral aspect of a tutor’s EI. The sense of knowing the tutor cared about them as individuals was apparent. The

three subordinate themes of making eye contact, using non-verbal cues and voice modulation and their prevalence amongst the students are shown in Table 9 below.

*Table 9: To Show the Subordinate Themes Linked to Perceiving Another's Emotions*

<b>Subordinate Theme</b>	<b>Participant i</b>	<b>Participant ii</b>	<b>Participant iii</b>	<b>Participant iv</b>	<b>Participant v</b>
Making eye contact	✓		✓	✓	
Using non-verbal cues	✓		✓	✓	
Voice modulation	✓	✓		✓	✓

#### ***4.8.1 Making Eye Contact to “Show You Care”***

The participants revealed that the tutor initiated her perception of their emotions by maintaining close eye contact. Participant i revealed that she found this aspect of her tutor's EI reassuring as it implied (for her) that the tutor had a concern for her students:

If you are looking at me, it means you care; you are interested if I'm understanding.

(i)

Participant iv agreed that the tutor remained focused on the screen and talked to them, maintaining eye contact with the screen as much as possible:

The only time she ever glanced down was when she was looking for her papers or a different screen to share. (iv)

#### **4.8.2 Using Non-verbal Cues to “Incorporate Students in the Lecture”**

The modules were delivered online, and the tutor had to engage with and maintain the students’ interest via a screen. The tutor appeared to monitor the students, looking for non-verbal cues to help identify the students’ emotions:

So, she will try to make us incorporated in the lecture. (i)

I was quite non-verbal (in the sessions), and then she would say like, ‘\*\*\*\* are you ok with that? You’re looking a bit puzzled.’ (iii)

I was looking confused, and she could tell by my facial expression. (iv)

These examples show how the tutor monitored the students’ expressions to gauge if the students were following and understanding the lecture. The students noticed that she routinely did this, and most explained that she would also ask if they had grasped the topic if they were looking puzzled.

#### **4.8.3 Using Voice Modulation to “Keep Lectures Interesting”**

During the lectures, the tutor modulated her voice to enable the students to remain focused:

I feel she was able to pick her tone of voice, OK? To make it interesting. I think that (her) voice was just right. (i)

Yeah, she really made it interesting. I really enjoyed that module. (ii)

Participant i understood that the tutor had used her tone of voice to keep the students engaged in the lecture. She knew the tutor modulated her voice to keep the students motivated and focused on completing their studies. Participant ii endorsed that the tutor’s inflexion helped make the topic more understandable and enjoyable for her, and Participant iv shared that:



I would say she consistently she kept me engaged, because of that, I do remember.

(iv)

Participant iv also acknowledged difficulties that affected the students due to the COVID-19 pandemic and how the tutor used her tone of voice to help maintain a calm atmosphere during lectures:

It's been such a funny time, hasn't it? Yes, I think the main thing was that she did consistently keep the group calm and (*and*) individuals as well not to get to the point where you're totally stressed out. (iv)

Participant iv knew that the tutor guided the group through the lectures and maintained a tranquil learning environment despite the circumstances forcing the classes to occur online. However, Participant v voiced the opinion that sometimes her cohort of students would procrastinate and be disruptive. The tutor, while she would regain control and have everyone back on task, was perhaps not as timely with her intervention as participant v would have wanted:

We all moved on eventually. But probably not as soon or as quickly as some of us would have liked; she did get there eventually. (v)

Using eventually twice implies her frustration and indicates that Participant v would have preferred the tutor to be brisker at refocusing the students' attention. The difficulty of the online classroom is doubly implied here; the miscreants could push boundaries as they were away from a face-to-face classroom, and perhaps the tutor gave them more leeway due to the online delivery. The participants were clear that the tutor did not simply deliver the lectures without considering their welfare. They described her warmth and genuine interest in their general well-being and comprehension of the concepts they studied:

Maybe she comes in maybe like five minutes earlier than the time. And then she's 'Oh, how are you doing?' She talks about the weather, something like general so. And then, she encouraged people to turn on their cameras to start the conversation. (i)

We would use the hands thing (*Thumbs up or down emojis on Teams*) to check about a lot of issues, but then obviously, when there were no questions or something like that, she would just have a look at our overall pictures and then if anyone was looking puzzled – and she did this to myself. Like I said, she, you know, picked up on it and, as I must've had a blank expression on my face. (iii)

The tutor demonstrated her interest in their welfare by maintaining eye contact throughout the lectures. Participant i saw how the tutor made herself available before the lecture, greeting students and putting them at ease, encouraging them to turn on their cameras and engage with her. Participant ii noticed that during the class the tutor routinely monitored their reactions, asking them to respond with a thumbs-up or down emoji. However, the tutor did not only rely on those responses but was quick to notice when the participants were looking puzzled or worried and would ask them by name if they were encountering obstacles to their studies.

The participants have described the traits they experienced, valued, and believed to be an integral part of their tutor's EI. They described their experiences regarding the tutor's rapport, empathy, clarification of their words and how they appreciated and benefitted from her encouragement. They unanimously believed that having an encouraging tutor was a particularly vital aspect of a tutor's EI. The participants shared how they experienced a tutor-student relationship with the tutor and benefited from it by how connected they felt and that they were known as individuals by her. They discussed her active listening skills and her inclusivity in the online lectures. They described her approachability and self-regulation as fundamental aspects of the tutor's EI. The participants explained that they appreciated that

they experienced the same tutor each week and sensed that they could ask questions of her and approach her for advice or help at any time during or after lectures. The participants said they were reassured that despite the lecture's online delivery, they experienced the tutor perceiving their emotions, talking to them, looking straight at the screen, and picking up on their non-verbal cues. They valued that the tutor used her tone of voice to keep the lectures lively and engaging and kept them moving towards their goals even when the students distracted each other.

#### **4.9. The Participants' Views of the Tutor's Emotional Intelligence**

Before contributing to this research, the participants may not have understood the term emotional intelligence. Nonetheless, the participants had all experienced being taught online by an emotionally intelligent tutor. They could all describe their experiences with the tutor and express the aspects of the tutor's EI that they felt were particularly important and impactful to them. Toward the end of each interview, after they had all clarified their view of the tutor's EI, each participant was asked how emotionally intelligent they thought the tutor was. Each participant was comfortable enough at that point in the interview to express their subjective opinion based on the discussion in which they had participated. Their responses were based on their understanding of having an emotionally intelligent tutor and their experiences, which they had discussed in depth with the researcher. All the participants agreed that they thought the tutor was emotionally intelligent. Their responses ranged from average to above average. Two participants, v and iii, felt the tutor had average EI levels:

*(The tutor was emotionally intelligent)* To some degree, yeah, because if it (*she*) wasn't, she wouldn't have made it easier. (iii)

I would say average. (v)

Participant v was surprised to find out that the tutor had an above-average level (revealed after the interview concluded at her request) and felt other tutors had taught her who had higher levels of EI. The three remaining participants all described the tutor as having above-average levels of EI:

I feel plus on average. (i)

I would say she had an above-average level of it. (ii)

Comparing it to me, above average. (iv)

Interestingly, the oldest participant, Participant iv, described the tutor's EI in the most detail during her interview, with frequent insights into her experiences. However, she was self-deprecating in her reply, indicating that she thought her own EI was somehow lacking.

#### **4.10. The Impact of the Tutor's Emotional Intelligence**

After the participants described their experiences with the tutor in the VLE and gave their opinions on the tutor's EI, they were asked if they thought their tutor's EI had had any impact on their attainment levels in the module. Participant i, who was one of the youngest and an international student, was adamant that the tutor's EI had no impact on her final grade:

No, I can't relate to it. (i)

The other participants (across two cohorts, B and C, all the age ranges and both international and home students) were unanimous in agreeing that the tutor's EI had had a positive impact on their grades:

Yes, in that module, I got my highest score. (ii)

It was a harder module, so my second or third highest score, but I enjoyed it, and to some degree, she simplified it and put my mind at ease. (iii)

Maybe I wouldn't have done as well with another lecturer, so yes, I think \*\*\*\* is partly to thank for a good grade. (v)

Participant iv then clarified the impact of the tutor's EI on her final grade for that module:

Of course, it (*the tutor's EI*) affects your score. It's bound to do. Yeah, so I was really pleased with my score. And she helped me to get it, but I think it's been one of the highest I've got, which I was proud to get. (iv)

She indicated that her final score resulted from her experiences with the tutor and that she benefited from the tutor's input. She was clear that the intervention and assistance of her emotionally intelligent tutor resulted in her gaining one of her highest marks for a module. Participant iv had described in detail her apprehension at doing a module in a VLE, the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had had on her and her self-doubts about her ability to work at the higher standard that the module demanded. Her delight in her eventual score and the relief that she had succeeded was palpable, and she was unequivocal in her view that her emotionally intelligent tutor had had a considerable impact on her and her academic achievement.

The more mature participants (iii, iv and v) talked in the interview about the difficulties they expected to experience in the module as it was their last before completing their degrees, and there was an expectation of higher work standards. They discussed the impact that COVID-19 had on them and the need to study in a VLE and its associated technology, which were concerns that they shared. Their concerns may have been due to being more mature, so they had more worries and demands away from their studies, and their maturity could have been a factor in their wariness of the technology required to study online. These fears were not shared by the two younger participants, whose relative youth could have made them more adaptable, and they may have been more technically aware and less

concerned about studying in a VLE than the older students. However, all the participants achieved good grades and said they found the module enjoyable, partly due to their tutor and her EI and its impact on themselves. These points are now summarised in Table 10 below.

*Table 10: To Show how the Students Perceived the Impact of the Tutor's EI*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age bracket</b>	<b>UK national</b>	<b>View on Tutor's EI</b>	<b>Impact on studies?</b>
i	20-30	no	above average	none
ii	20-30	yes	above average	yes
iii	30-40	no	average	yes
iv	50-60	yes	above average	yes
v	30-40	yes	average	yes

#### **4.11. Summary of Chapter Four, the Findings**

It can be seen throughout this analysis that these student participants experienced their tutors' EI levels in numerous ways and defined them concerning themselves and other tutors. Although before the interview, the participants may not have actively considered the tutor's emotional intelligence, they had experienced being tutored by an emotionally intelligent tutor in a VLE. They were all able to discuss the aspects they considered essential and relevant. The participants in this small research study discussed the tutor's EI abilities as they related to Salovey and Meyer's (1997) four-branch ability model (see Figure 1, Chapter Two). Salovey and Meyer's ability model of EI incorporated.

The ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate

emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth. (Salovey & Meyer, 1997, p. 10).

Salovey and Meyer's (1997) four-branch model begins with the ability to perceive, appraise, and express emotion. This branch relates to the emotional perception of the self and others, and it was significant that all the participants talked about how the tutor appeared to understand them and read their emotions. Participant iv said: 'She understood. She knew we were struggling.' Participant iv described the tutor's ability to perceive the students' emotions, which was reinforced by Participant ii, who commented:

\*\*\*\* read her expression and how she described her answer. But she realised she doesn't understand. (ii)

She went on to say that she thought the tutor was particularly good at understanding others' emotions. The participants also knew the tutor's ability to express her emotions appropriately. They described how the tutor had shared her difficulties with them (concerning adjusting to being in the VLE and her time as a student); in this way, she demonstrated her EI abilities and reassured the students that their feelings and emotions were not unusual.

The second branch of Salovey and Meyer's (1997) model concerns the ability to access and generate feelings when they facilitate thought. This emotional facilitation branch concerns one's ability to stimulate cognitive processes. Participant iv explained how the tutor demonstrated her ability to create feelings of accomplishment and achievement in the students when she described how she revealed the topic of her dissertation to the tutor:

It was a little bit different, and she said, 'Oh?' and I could tell that twinkle in her eye. And she was a little bit interested in it herself. (iv)

The tutor's interest in the student's topic seemed essential to the participant. It appeared to validate the student's thinking and knowing her topic was attractive to the tutor gave her the confidence to continue. Having a tutor who can access their emotions to facilitate their students' endeavours is vital for all students. However, in the remote world of the VLE, which is a disconnected reality, having tutors who can draw on their EI abilities to facilitate another's cognitive processes can be understood to be advantageous.

The third branch of Salovey and Meyer's (1997) model refers to understanding emotions and emotional knowledge and is concerned with discerning how emotions progress or combine to create emotional pathways. Participant ii said that she thought the tutor was skilled at "understanding others' emotions as she was really warm and caring, and she was in tune with our emotions really." Working in a VLE may present difficulties to the tutor due to the remote access. Many body cues cannot be easily seen, and a tutor must rely on tone of voice and facial expression to garner understanding about their students. Previous research has shown that EI enables a greater understanding of the emotions of the self and others and is shown to be a crucial VLE ability.

The fourth and final branch of Salovey and Meyer's (1997) model is concerned with emotional management or regulation. The research spanned a time of global upheaval and uncertainty, which few human beings can claim to have not affected them either indirectly or directly. The participants spoke of their doubts and uncertainties of that time and how the tutor reassured them and enabled them to study effectively despite the pandemic and the result of learning in a VLE. Participant iii said: "I felt so relieved after a few sessions." One of the ways the tutor reassured the students was with her even emotional state. Participant iii continued:



The consistency of her attitude of her nature of her emotions. If you like, we got the same \*\*\*\*\* every time. (iii)

The tutor repeatedly demonstrated her emotional regulation by having the same demeanour every week at their lectures. The emotional management of the tutor was also apparent in the few negative situations the students mentioned and the way the tutor moved the lesson on by modulating her voice. Participant iv said the tutor would:

Sound slightly annoyed like the rest of us who would have our annoyed faces on. So, she would then change to kind of pull everybody back into the session. (iv)

The participants talked about the tutor's ability to understand them and read their emotional cues and how she appeared to understand their difficulties. They described her attentiveness towards them, showing interest in their work. The participants also explained how the tutor used the emotional cues available to her to assess the classroom environment and to maintain a sense of harmony among the students. The warmth with which they discussed the tutor, and their online lectures showed how much they valued her and her EI's impact on their module and academic achievement.

The participants varied in how emotionally intelligent they thought she was, but they all agreed that she was emotionally intelligent. Four of the five decided that the Tutor's EI had a subsequent impact on their final module score. However, all the participants agreed on four aspects of her emotional intelligence: her encouragement of the student cohort, her determination to build relationships with all the students, her approachability, and her ongoing interest in their welfare.

Having presented the data gathered in this phenomenological research study in a Husserlian transcendental manner, the following chapter, Chapter Five, using the SPA, is the second half of the literature review. Chapter Five considers why this research is relevant by

focussing on emotionally intelligent tutors' abilities when such tutors and their students interact in the VLE. The relationship between this thesis and the previous EI debates is highlighted and discussed. Finally, the potential impact of being emotionally intelligent on others is considered when interactions between emotionally intelligent tutors and their students occur in synchronous online lectures.

## **5. Chapter Five: Part Two of the Literature Review:**

### **Literature Focussing on the Abilities of Emotionally Intelligent Tutors**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

This second part of the literature review now discusses the significance of this study and the contexts in which emotional intelligence (EI) has a relevant impact on this phenomenological research. This literature review seeks to identify and highlight a gap in the known knowledge and demonstrate how new understanding can enable the phenomenon to be better understood (Dibley et al., 2020). The lack of prior research into student perceptions influenced the focus of this review, which was completed after the data analysis to maintain the researcher's *Reduction* (Husserl, 2012a) and to align this research with the synergistic phenomenological approach (SPA) that underlines it. The research data captured and described the participants' experience of the phenomenon's *Essence* (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). The focus was on being in the participants' world and experiencing the phenomenon of having an emotionally intelligent tutor (Heidegger, 1996).

Phenomenological studies consider what and how the participants experience the phenomenon (Chalmers & Cowdell, 2021) and align with the principle that human beings use their subjective experiences to understand meanings (Husserl, 2012a). Heideggerian phenomenology does not consider the phenomenon in seclusion but recognises the effects of outside influences (Dibley et al., 2020). In this way, the researcher can construct more meaningful data comparisons within the discussion of the data without compromising the data by performing the literature review before the analysis (Hamill, 2010). Post-data collection literature reviewing can lead to a focused review that is open to including more diverse sources of knowledge and understanding (Dibley et al., 2020). Incorporating the literature study after the data collection and analysis can also maintain the participants'

voices and the phenomenon's *Essence* (Husserl, 2012a). Thus, the research was closely aligned with the fusion (Aguas, 2022) of the two approaches to phenomenology (Husserlian and Heideggerian) used in synergy as the philosophical foundation for this thesis.

This thesis focuses on a socially structured and culturally driven understanding of the participants' experiences of a complex phenomenon. The hybrid approach adopted brought elements of descriptive and interpretive phenomenology together to clarify the phenomenon (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). The two phenomenological schools that underscore this thesis converge and are used in collaboration, reiterating Hein and Austin (2001), who indicated that there are numerous ways to conduct phenomenological research. The SPA allowed the research to progress and evolve in a naturalistic manner (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). This phenomenological research focuses on the junction between the *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) and reality, neither of which stand in isolation but must be considered together (Zahavi, 2020).

The research aims and questions are resumed in this section, highlighting social interactions to draw parallels to the interactions between emotionally intelligent tutors and their students in synchronous online or virtual learning environments (VLE). Calls have been made that more research is required to understand the emotional issues associated with VLE instruction (Arghode et al., 2022; Awwad, 2022). There is a lack of understanding about this topic due to the scarcity of relevant empirical research investigating students' perceptions of their tutors' EI or the impact of tutors' EI on students when studying in a VLE. Despite the proliferation of research into EI and its impact on tutors, the lived experiences of students taught in VLEs by emotionally intelligent tutors remain underexplored. Scant prior research has considered the students' views of their emotionally intelligent tutors.

Nonetheless, it has been found that students believe the tutor's EI increases their effectiveness and impacts the learning environment to enhance academic engagement and achievement (Maamari & Salloum, 2023). Research has also indicated that students generally viewed online education positively, and postgraduate students have suggested that if their internet access was sufficient, they preferred online sessions (Syahbrudin et al., 2024). In contrast, Spencer, and Temple (2021) found that undergraduates' academic performance improved after face-to-face teaching. Nevertheless, Spencer and Temple's (2021) results were variable, and they suggested that further study was warranted to corroborate their findings. Additional research has considered student perceptions of online and face-to-face tutoring (Nguyen et al., 2021); their conclusions indicated that face-to-face instruction was preferred and generally gave the best academic results. Nguyen et al. (2021) also reflected on online instruction and found that students prefer synchronous sessions with active learning techniques incorporated to engage students and increase participation. O'Shea et al. (2015) found that increased participation of students in VLEs enabled them to navigate and engage with their studies in a way comparable to if they had experienced face-to-face studies. Similarly, Salama and Hinton (2023) found engaging students in VLEs a significant challenge for online tutors; their review of online instruction in HE also identified gaps in understanding students' needs concerning VLE instruction.

With little empirical research regarding students' views of tutors, this second half of the literature review focuses on the skills an emotionally intelligent tutor could possess. The finding from the literature contrasts with the attributes the participants perceived as necessary (see Chapter Four, Data Presentation and Description) and explored in Chapter Six the Data Interpretation and Discussion. The following section discusses and reviews what is known from previous empirical research and scholarly work on the tutor's emotional intelligence. However, such research is scarce, so parallels have been made to literature focusing on other

educational professionals such as teachers and teacher training, management training, students' views, academic literature, and theoretical frameworks. This literature review considers tutor emotional intelligence competencies (EIC), which may be factors in determining a tutor's instructional efficacy (Tevdovska, 2017), and the following discussion is focussed on what prior research studies have highlighted as the competencies an emotionally intelligent educator may possess and which the participants in this study could have experienced while in the VLE.

This research is relevant and timely; tutor EI in online and blended learning contexts has been recently explored by Youde (2020). Although small-scale, Youde's (2020) investigations into the concept of tutor EI levels have suggested that tutor EI is highly desirable when teaching is delivered online or in a blended learning environment. Online education has transformed teaching and learning, making it more accessible, with different professions, such as nurse educators, adopting online tutoring as the modality of choice for instruction in their field (Ali et al., 2017) and many higher education institutions (HEI) choosing to offer remote educational courses (UCAS, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst that caused a global shift to online teaching and learning spaces (Anthony Jnr & Noel, 2021; Quezada et al., 2020; Williams & Corwith, 2021). As a result, there was an urgent requirement to reconsider the instructional strategies employed by institutions to respond to the increased demand for online learning (Răducu & Stănculescu, 2021). There was an imperative need to utilise all the advantages that technology could provide (MacCann et al., 2012) to enable a previously unimagined global "comprehensive online education" (Toprak & Tunc, 2022, p. 621). The increase in VLE learning has led to an influx of tutors working in online teaching and learning environments due to the growing number of online and distance learning courses (UCAS, 2024). While

there has been a shift back to face-to-face in many HEIs, there are some early indications that aspects of online instruction and assessment are here to stay (Williams & Donlan, 2023).

There has been some recognition that this relatively new mode of delivery dating back to the 1990s (Saba, 2011) requires a broader, more emotionally intelligent skillset (Nguyen et al., 2021) than might be needed for face-to-face delivery. However, little joined-up thinking has considered the benefit of having more emotionally intelligent tutors in VLEs, which this research study aims to address.

Quezada et al. (2020) found that the quality of instruction within a VLE can fall short of that in a face-to-face setting due to a lack of collaborative learning and the lack of ability of the tutor to use their EI. It would seem advantageous for institutions to employ tutors working in VLEs who can design and deliver instruction and be experts in their subjects, as Nafukho et al. (2004) recommended twenty years ago. More recently, Youde's (2020) research noted that it is advantageous for tutors to effectively develop their EI levels to instruct students in blended and online learning situations. Synchronous online learning may lack the advantage of body language due to a disinclination to screen share or the lack of visibility in group sessions, with the participants being reduced to a small section of the screen. It is harder for both parties to interpret visual clues and read signals due to the method of interaction, as the technology used to deliver the lecture creates a barrier (Boelens et al., 2017). However, Youde (2020) found that emotionally intelligent tutors can compensate for the lesson's remote delivery method and engage their students in their learning despite remote learning being more difficult than face-to-face.

There has been much quantitative empirical research that has investigated HE tutor EI (Ali et al., 2017; Arghode et al., 2022; Gunasekara et al., 2022; Khassawneh et al., 2022) and that has aided in highlighting various desirable emotionally intelligent tutor attributes.

Arghode et al. (2022) found that tutors working in VLEs should be aware of the emotional issues implicated in the remote delivery of their lesson and modify their instruction to enable the students to engage with the task and improve their learning. Răducu and Stănculescu (2021) deduced with their research that teaching delivered in the VLE requires an EI tutor who can navigate their students through a learning process that ignores the limitations of the delivery method and encourages the students' motivation. Meanwhile, Wu et al. (2019) indicated that emotionally intelligent tutors could motivate and engage students to improve their academic success.

Over ten years ago, quantitative research had suggested that EI tutors would be aware that the VLE demanded that they have a conscious awareness of their non-verbal cues, modulating their tone of voice to be friendly and pay attention to their body language to help the students relax and focus (Jacob et al., 2013). More recently, qualitative research into EI tutors' attributes by Gunasekara et al., (2022) indicated that emotionally intelligent tutors would be able to ensure students feel safe in the VLE by building trust through holding short informal conversations with their students to help them settle into the lesson and apply themselves to learning.

EI, emotional recognition, and regulation lead to good working relationships between tutor and student, enabling the tutor to connect with, motivate, encourage, and support their students to succeed in their learning (Mortiboys, 2012). The focus of previous studies on the construct of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman & Cherniss, 2001; Mayer et al., 2003; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) was based on the first-person viewpoint. These prior studies lack research into another's or third-person perspectives (see Jelfs et al., 2009); hence, this research study focuses on the students' perspectives of the tutor's EI and its impact on them. Little research has considered the students' perspectives or provided a detailed evaluation of their



viewpoints on their tutor's EI in the VLE. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the previous research focused on face-to-face delivery (Ali et al., 2017), and there have been scarce reports on online learning or VLEs in the context of students' views. However, due to the pandemic, some research is now focussed on online learning and the difference in student experiences pre- and post-COVID-19 (Fridkin et al., 2023; Toprak & Tunc, 2022). There has been some recent research considering the students' perceptions of the VLE tutor's effectiveness by Enwereji et al. (2023), whose findings indicated that their participants felt there was a need for online tutors' abilities to be improved through specific training. However, there is little evidence of current research into the students' perceptions of VLE tutors' EI.

This lack of students' views indicates a clear potential for an original and significant contribution to EI's current knowledge and understanding to promote the concept and its relevance to a broader audience. At the same time, there is a lack of knowledge about what it is like to experience the phenomenon of having an emotionally intelligent tutor in a VLE or an understanding of the student's lived experiences (*Lebenswelt*) (Husserl, 1970), as discovered from a phenomenological perspective. Therefore, the next step is to investigate students' perceptions of the tutor's EI, as this aspect of EI's importance has been overlooked (Ali et al., 2017; Awwad et al., 2022; Youde, 2020). This research study uses phenomenological enquiry to construct data that gives meaning and relevance to the reality of the participants' lived experiences (Willis, 2001). Nevertheless, relevant literature was scarce due to the lack of research into students' perceptions. The lack of such literature presented difficulties to the researcher, who had to carefully consider where best to align the literature review to illuminate the findings from the research. Ultimately, the impact of EI on the tutor's abilities seemed a logical route to take to understand what previous empirical research

had found were the attributes of being EI and which the students may have experienced in the VLE.

Having introduced the second part of the literature review in detail and established the research parameters, the research questions are now included to demonstrate the study's relevance and the ability to address the knowledge gap.

## **5.2. The Research Questions**

Phenomenology always seeks to ask how human participants experience a phenomenon, and the focus is on the experience given by the participants, so there may only be one research question in a phenomenological research study to consider the phenomenon as experienced by the participants (van Manen, 2016a). In this study, one primary and one secondary research question were devised to investigate the reality of experiencing the tutor's EI levels with the student participants:

- How do students recognise and experience the tutor's emotional intelligence in synchronous online learning contexts?
- How do students recognise and value the tutor's emotional intelligence levels in synchronous online learning contexts?

Both questions were considered using the previously highlighted working definition of EI: the identification of emotions in oneself and others, the self-management of emotional states and the ability to enable others to do the same (Vaida & Opre, 2014).

## **5.3. The Findings from the Literature Review**

This thesis now considers the potential impact of being an emotionally intelligent tutor, as having EI could impact every area of academic life. Recent research by Gunasekara et al. (2022) indicated that an emotionally intelligent tutor might effectively communicate

their subject matter and be attuned to understanding their students' needs while maintaining synchronous VLEs built on trust. Their findings indicated that student trust was necessary for the students to make academic progress and that the tutor built trust, supporting their emotional state and building positive relationships with the students. Regular synchronous sessions facilitated these relationships. Synchronous sessions involve a physical real-time presence of the student and tutor, and it has been found that tutors with an emotionally intelligent social presence are better able to meet their students' emotional needs (Nguyen et al., 2021).

This research study focuses on the benefits of having an emotionally intelligent tutor when the teaching or seminar has been delivered synchronously. Online learning was found to have negatively impacted many students during the COVID-19 pandemic due to feelings of isolation, lack of peer interaction and difficulties in contacting their tutors (Day et al., 2021) and Ferri et al. (2020) suggested that there was a negative effect on academic performance by online learning. The move to emergency online VLEs was found to cause anxiety to students, with studies such as Toprak and Tunc (2022) finding that 94% (within their study) of students experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety due to a lack of in-person communication. Their findings were reiterated in a linear study by Fridkin et al. (2023), who found that university students who had anticipated being in face-to-face lectures faced higher-than-expected academic stress due to the pandemic and the remote learning sessions. The students included in this research study also anticipated attending face-to-face sessions and instead experienced their lectures at a time when sessions were delivered synchronously online. Both sets of findings from Fridkin et al. (2023) and Toprak and Tunc (2022) suggest that the stress of being a HE student during the pandemic lockdowns was substantial for students and had a direct impact on motivation and coping strategies, although the findings from Day et al. (2021) indicated that HE students who were expecting to have

face-to-face sessions struggled to adapt more than those students with a prior online experience. This study will carefully consider the participants' responses to discover if having an EI tutor ameliorated any of the maladaptive effects of the pandemic.

Research into synchronous VLEs has shown that regularly scheduled classes, which included aspects of direct participation based on socially active learning, helped to allay students' fears and feelings of isolation (Nguyen et al., 2021). The participants in this study experienced weekly synchronous classes with the tutor for at least one 12-week module in the 2021/ 2022 academic year, completed in the previous term to the interviews commencing. The participants received two- or three-hour synchronous instruction per week, drafted work was given written feedback, and individual tutorial sessions were provided as timetabled between the tutor and individual students. In addition, the tutor encouraged the students to remain online after sessions to ask questions or email the tutor if they desired. One student who had missed sessions through illness was given individual online 'catch-up' sessions. This research study focused on the weekly synchronous VLE instructional sessions. However, the participants did refer to the other points of contact with their tutor, which were all online, although they may not have been synchronous, such as email messages.

Academic research and the associated literature explore EI in various fields, such as management, business, nursing, and health care. The literature in this section has an educational focus but draws on additional relevant studies which could be applied to an educational setting or have parallels with educational research. Focussing on educational research ensures a close alignment with the research topic and illuminates this research's position within an academic context. Significant research into potential aspects of a tutor's EI, their abilities, and their subsequent interplay within the VLE is now considered under the following headings:

- Having an Emotionally Intelligent workforce,
- Emotional Intelligence and its Impact on Working in a Role with Interpersonal Interactions,
- The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on the Tutor's Self-Efficacy,
- The Effect of Emotional Intelligence on the Tutor's Performance,
- Emotional Regulation and Emotional Expression as an Aspect of One's Culture,
- Emotional Intelligence and the Intercultural VLE,
- Emotional Intelligence and its Impact on the Tutor's Stress Levels,
- Developing the Tutor's Emotional Intelligence,
- Emotionally Intelligent Females and
- Emotionally Intelligent Potential Communities of Practice.

### ***5.3.1 Having an Emotionally Intelligent Educational Workforce***

It has been suggested that HE institutions consider their employees' EI alongside their qualifications, skill set, and knowledge base when recruiting, as according to research by Dirican and Erdil (2020), tutor EI-related abilities increase productivity, which has a direct effect on all aspects of their work. In other sectors, a meta-analysis by Pirsoul et al. (2023) has found EI to predict job performance, an ability to cope with career-related difficulties and career satisfaction. Job performance as a measure of EI could be applied to an educational context because job performance and career satisfaction are also crucial for academic employees. D'Souza et al. (2023) found that educational employees who possess higher EI partake in extra tasks within the workplace environment, such as helping others, which enhances the workplace, boosting the commonality and harmony among teams of employees and increasing the departmental output. An emotionally intelligent, institutional workforce could lead to greater job performance and career satisfaction, as is the case in the service

industry, and be beneficial in educational contexts by ensuring staff productivity. It has also been pointed out that retraining educational staff in best EI practices may not be cost-effective for HE institutions and that they should exercise care in selecting suitable emotionally intelligent staff (Youde, 2020).

### ***5.3.2 Emotional Intelligence and its Impact on Working in a Role with Interpersonal Interactions***

Generally, it has been suggested that employers have a higher regard for employees who can demonstrate their EI in social interactions (Gill et al., 2015). At the same time, different scenarios will make the same person's EI response vary, so reactions when one is at work, for example, may be entirely different from that if one was at home, as the context of the setting or role has a direct impact on performance (Cherniss, 2010). There has been speculation that job roles (such as those in education) where there is a need to be able to "communicate with a diverse audience" (Murphy et al., 2006, p. 352) could benefit from having emotionally intelligent employees, as employee EI acts as both a buffer and a bridge within those communications and social interactions. EI could, therefore, play a significant part in specific jobs involving social interactions, such as tutoring and teaching, as suggested by Arghode et al. (2022) in their review of online instruction, who made the point that tutors who work in a VLE should be aware of potential emotional issues, and be able to adapt their delivery to engage students to increase learner's understanding and subject engagement.

Due to the considerable number of interpersonal reactions in their role, tutors could benefit from being emotionally intelligent to have the ability to control their emotional responses and those of their students (Khassawneh et al., 2022). The study by Minbashian et al. (2018) found that an emotionally intelligent management workforce will be able to use their understanding of their emotional responses to produce assiduous behavioural responses to demanding tasks; they may not knowingly do so, but through repeated opportunities, their

adaptive responses may become autonomic. Minbashian et al.'s (2018) research indicated that an emotionally intelligent tutor workforce might also be capable of refining their emotional responses to their students based on their students' manner of presentation and, in this way, improve their tutor-student relationships and, over time, through repetition, become more competent at doing so.

When tutors understand and manage their own and their students' emotional responses, this has the potential to increase the social interactions and understandings within the VLE in a manner similar to that found by Jacob et al. (2016). Their research demonstrated that EI indicates an ability to use non-verbal signals to understand others intended meanings (Jacob et al., 2013; Jacob et al., 2016) even when there is a mismatch between verbal and non-verbal signals. The ability to understand mismatched verbal and non-verbal cues could be significant for tutors in VLEs, where the medium of the VLE can inhibit non-verbal signals or make them harder to perceive. Jordan and Troth (2004) investigated the impact of EI on workplace interactions when engaged in teamwork and found that EI heavily impacted such interactions. Their findings were further elaborated by Minbashian et al. (2018), who found that managers may use their emotions to moderate their behaviours when engaged in demanding tasks to enable them to work to the best of their ability and that this is enhanced through repetition. The indication here is that those emotionally intelligent tutors working consistently in a VLE could, therefore, become more skilled in the skills required for learning delivery and student management in online learning.

The role emotionally intelligent tutors have in the HE VLE teaching sector should not be underestimated. Tutors should be capable of building a rapport with all their students, particularly in a VLE with its remote delivery method. Majeski et al. (2017) found that emotionally intelligent tutors may be able to use their EI to settle differences of opinion and

foster a spirit of cooperation to encourage the participants in the VLE to work together. Tutors are responsible for ensuring the VLE is conducive to learning and enabling their students to do so, utilising their EI to notice and understand their students' emotions in the manner found by Dolev and Leshem (2017).

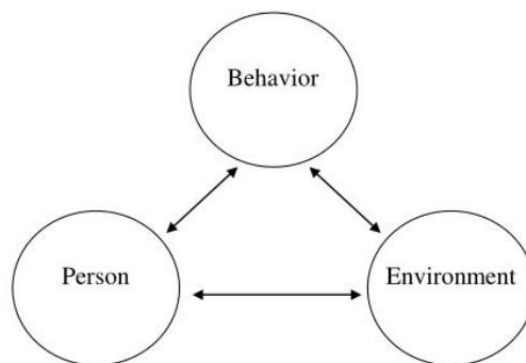
As a result of the uniquely different approach to learning within synchronous VLEs, the online student-tutor relationship may be experienced differently than face-to-face relationships. The phenomenon has been studied by Kaur et al. (2019). They concluded that having an emotionally intelligent tutor transformed the tutor-student relationship into one of "mentor-friend" (Kaur et al., 2019, p. 189), which was less distant and remote and warmer, showing empathy and kindness. Tutors should be sensitive to their students' needs, and being emotionally intelligent could facilitate this sensitivity. Azeem et al.'s (2019) study found that emotional intelligence enables tutors to have an emotional meter, allowing them to acknowledge and understand their students' feelings and perspectives. Having an emotionally intelligent tutor was found by Khassawneh et al. (2022) to enable the process of mutual connection so students feel comfortable asking the tutor for help or sharing their concerns. The findings from other industries and management indicate promising overlaps with the educational EI studies and suggest that VLE tutor performance could be enhanced when the tutor possesses EI abilities and that when these are successfully employed, they could positively impact their students.

This research utilises a constructivist understanding of EI and draws on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) to understand the dynamics and motivators present in the VLE. A constructivist view of Bandura's (1986) theory acknowledges effective tutoring within a VLE as necessarily a social endeavour and that the emotional dynamic is fundamental to promoting learning (Kyriakides et al., 2013). Tutors and students must



interact socially to enable understanding and knowledge transfer to take place, and the actors' emotional responses determine what cognitive outcomes take place (Siegel, 2020). Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory acknowledges that humans acquire knowledge through active engagement with their social setting and acquire understanding when that engagement is followed by subsequent reflection. The individual, their behaviour, and the environment (see Figure 4) form a cyclical triad. Each vertex on the diagram has an equal effect on and is affected by the others. It is within this interaction that knowledge is transmitted and learned, and it may be considered a fundamental aspect of teaching and learning in both face-to-face and online settings.

*Figure 4: To show Bandura's (1986) Triadic Social Cognitive Theory*



Learning may, therefore, be described as an interaction between a person, the environment, and their behaviours. The three elements must interact with each other to shape the learning that follows. Bandura's (1986) assumption was that personal beliefs, environmental factors and behaviour all affect each other, and these are the direct results of social observations, experiences, and feedback. Thus, it can be seen that the tutor will affect the students, imparting knowledge and learning while at the same time, the students' impact upon the tutor, with both parties adjusting their responses to ameliorate their own emotional needs (Holzberger et al., 2014). How the students and tutor engage with each other to

construct what is known to them is explored in this research study, and the research then adds to the sum of knowledge of student perceptions of their emotionally intelligent tutors.

### ***5.3.3 The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Self-Efficacy***

HE tutors' self-efficacy has been positively linked to higher levels of EI by Ali et al. (2017). Self-efficacy is the belief an individual has in their ability to perform a task, and the higher their level of EI, the greater their confidence and the higher their self-efficacy becomes (Wu et al., 2019). An awareness of one's positive emotions increases self-confidence and motivation and has been found to positively affect all human interactions (Mayer et al., 2004). Vesely et al. (2014, p. 81) claimed that for teachers to be effective 'emotional intelligence is the foundation for enhancing teacher efficacy.' At the same time, emotionally intelligent teachers experience fewer feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and greater self-accomplishment, as EI has been shown to moderate teacher burnout syndrome (Cohen & Abedallah, 2015; D'Amico et al., 2020). Burnout is acknowledged to be prevalent in the educational industry (Mancini et al., 2022), but EI can be a protective factor in reducing burnout due to its negating impact (Mancini et al., 2022; Vesely et al., 2014). (See the further discussion in the EI and tutor's stress section 5.3.10, below.)

Wu et al. (2019) found that emotionally intelligent teachers have a higher self-efficacy and belief in improving their students' performance and influencing their behaviours. Emotional intelligence in teachers has also been shown to have a positive impact on Chinese student academic achievement by Wang (2022), whose findings indicated the importance of the relationship between EI, teacher self-efficacy and increased student achievement. Research by Răducu and Stănculescu (2021) found that emotionally intelligent teachers can utilise their self-efficacy to be more adaptable within the classroom, and this was

corroborated more recently by Dallman (2022), whose research found that the teachers' self-efficacy has been shown to have a positive moderating influence on the teacher-student relationship, which is mutually influential. In the HE sector, Anwar et al. (2021) studied the role that EI plays in tutor effectiveness, and their findings added to the importance of tutor EI and self-efficacy in improving teacher effectiveness, albeit their findings also emphasised the role self-efficacy has in predicting effectiveness without considering the role EI has in increasing their self-efficacy.

Although most research into educators' self-efficacy has been conducted with teachers rather than HE tutors, being an EI tutor would similarly indicate the probability of higher levels of self-efficacy, as the impact of their EI would be to raise their self-efficacy. However, the study by Anwar et al. (2021), demonstrated that greater EI levels increased the self-efficacy and effectiveness of the tutor. This research will, therefore, consider the tutor's self-efficacy levels to further corroborate the previous studies' findings and further strengthen what is known about all educators, adding the viewpoint of students of HE tutors.

#### ***5.3.4 The Effect of Being Emotionally Intelligent on the Tutor's Performance***

Emotional intelligence has been found to predict academic and job performance accurately, and its significance has been proven in many different fields (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005; Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2017) and particularly in education (Goleman, 2004). EI can benefit the tutor, providing the impetus for self-improvement and enhancing performance due to increased positive feelings and job satisfaction (Kaur et al., 2019). EI has also been globally acknowledged to be a valuable characteristic of tutor competence (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2018) and following their research, Gilar-Corbi et al. (2019) suggested that trainee teachers can be taught basic emotional intelligence skills and have a significant improvement

in EI levels to boost their subsequent teaching performance and future professional development.

HE Tutor EI has been found to positively impact social behaviours that emphasise internal experiences and the emotional requirements of others and the self (Majeski et al., 2017). These social behaviours and emotions play a relevant role in tutoring, influencing the tutor's attitudes and, ultimately, their performance (Kaur et al., 2019). Research by Kaur et al. (2019) found that the tutor's performance in teaching and learning is as positively impacted by their EI compared to the impact of academic knowledge and understanding of the subject. The relationship between tutors' EI and their performance was recently clarified further by Bibi et al. (2022), whose research has demonstrated a strong and significant correlation between EI and a tutor's job performance in face-to-face classrooms. This research will consider the tutor's performance as evaluated by the participants to add to the body of research indicating the relevance of tutor EI to their job performance in the synchronous VLE from the viewpoint of their students.

### ***5.3.5 Emotional Expression and Regulation as an Aspect of One's Cultural Heritage***

The culture we are born into and live our lives in impacts how we react and respond to any given situation, and members of diverse cultures may have different collective responses to the same conditions or situations (Adler, 1991). Mayer et al. (2002) originally suggested that cultural differences had little to no impact on EI. However, globally, culture has been acknowledged to impact emotional regulation (ER) and emotional expression (EE), as culture plays a role in how a person articulates or internalises their emotions (Khassawneh et al., 2022). EI is considered to help regulate emotions positively and enable a culturally appropriate emotional display (Miao et al., 2021). Arghode et al.'s (2022) review of EI intercultural competencies and VLE instruction found that EI tutors use their EI to create

VLEs where the students' EE is valued as a strength, and the myriad cultural differences found within them are viewed as opportunities to strengthen learning opportunities in VLEs.

Prior research into industrial and organisational psychology has revealed the strong relationship between EI and ER and established the link between the management of emotions by Perrewe & Ganster (2011), which has been previously described as a "conscious emotion regulation process" (Joseph & Newman, 2010, p. 58) whereby the ability to understand emotions (of the self or others) mediates the ability to regulate and perceive emotions. Kaur et al. (2019) added to the knowledge of ER when their findings indicated that the ER of the tutor's self and the student was vital to keep the VLE functioning at its best and to maintain the stability between the conventional and online teaching approaches, which may be used in the VLE.

Tutoring requires the tutor to deliberately manage their emotions and then become an "emotional worker" (Yin, 2015, p. 789) who is sensitive to the demands of their role on their emotions and adept at emotional regulation to create an appropriate facial and bodily display. An emotionally intelligent tutor who can easily distinguish emotion will potentially find it easier to express their emotions and appropriately respond to the students, enabling socially adapted appropriate behaviours in the VLE (Majeski et al., 2017). The preceding research has indicated the role of the tutor's cultural heritage and emotional intelligence in regulating and expressing emotions; this research will investigate the significance of these points to the participants. It will question whether the international students noticed or felt differences in how the tutor received their cultural knowledge. It will consider how the participants perceived the ER and emotional displays of the tutor in their VLEs to add student's perspectives to the body of evidence about the abilities of emotionally intelligent tutors working in VLEs.

### **5.3.6 *Emotional Intelligence and the Intercultural VLE***

The recent review by Arghode et al. (2022) found that tutors may use their EI when they are in synchronous learning spaces to underpin intercultural competencies, indicating that the tutor may constantly be alert to any cultural differences displayed by the students and notice any of the difficulties that students from minority or other cultures may be experiencing. Non-verbal communication of feelings may be due entirely or partly to an individual's cultural heritage, which has shaped their self-perception and controls their outward emotional display (Khassawneh et al., 2022). This research will consider whether students in VLEs are perceptually aware of an emotionally intelligent tutor who can be mindful of, interpret, and understand these non-verbal cues based on the students' perceptions of the tutor's responses to them. Previous research suggested that culture profoundly affects an individual's EI, and a person could be considered emotionally intelligent in one cultural setting but less so in another (Bölle, 2021). Nonetheless, research by Khassawneh et al. (2022) suggested that emotionally intelligent tutors could be able to mitigate their intercultural students' difficulties by focusing their attention on their students as whole people, altering their methods of instruction to meet their needs and encouraging them to participate fully in the VLE.

The differences in the students' cultural backgrounds could negatively impact their access to the VLE (Day et al., 2021) and their interaction, understanding and learning. An emotionally intelligent tutor may be able to address their different learning needs and make suitable adjustments to enable those students to participate and progress (Majeski et al., 2017). Within the VLE, having a cohort of students from many cultures can highlight the differences in background and nationality, which may negatively impact some students (Arghode et al., 2022). However, an emotionally intelligent tutor may lessen the impact of the differences by being aware of the students and their displays of discomfort. The study by

Dallman (2022) revealed that a teacher's EI and cultural intelligence are vital when working with multicultural cohorts and that an emotionally intelligent teacher positively impacts such teacher-student relationships.

In the current climate of institutions encouraging international students to enrol in their courses and the general globalisation of education where diverse intercultural students learn together, Arghode et al.'s (2022) review indicated the importance of the tutor's EI in conjunction with their intercultural knowledge. Tutor EI and their intercultural knowledge were found to be significant for tutors working with diverse cultural groups of students in VLEs. This study aims to increase understanding around this critical area, with a focus on the students' views to reinforce Dallman's (2022) and Arghode's (2022) findings and to particularly understand the perceptions of the international students regarding their tutor-student relationships built and maintained in the VLE.

### ***5.3.7 Emotional Intelligence and its Impact on the Tutor's Stress Levels***

The educational research by Mérida-López and Extremera (2017) found that teaching is a stressful occupation, as educators are expected to manage a myriad of stress factors, including (but not limited to) occupational duties, a lack of definition of their role, lack of employer support and classroom management issues. Like teachers, HE tutors have also been found to experience high-stress levels and burnout due to their challenging roles (Watts & Robertson, 2011). Following their across-culture research, Khassawneh and Abaker (2022) have also recently discovered that HE tutoring ranks as one of the most stressful career choices due to the elevated and prolonged levels of job stress.

Teaching is made more stressful as the teacher manages their emotions to positively impact the learning environment for their pupils (Kaur et al., 2018). The need to be professional and mask their emotional condition from their students was found by Kaur et al.

(2019, p. 191) to be vital “to be able to stimulate an emotional state which is conducive to learning.” The research by Kaur et al. (2019) indicated that tutors self-manage their emotions in HE settings to regulate their emotional responses and do so to control their workplace emotional display and that of their students. However, as they are dealing with HE students, they may have to employ more significant measures to impact the learning space effectively, as the students themselves are more likely to be socially aware of their tutor’s stress due to their increasing maturity.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a further contributor to the teachers’ (Robinson et al., 2023), tutors’ (D’Souza et al., 2023) and students’ (Kavvadas et al., 2023; Sundarassen et al., 2020; Toprak & Tunc, 2022) stress levels from the global effects and the challenges from the response to the requirement to move to emergency online education as a result of the need to maintain social distancing (Jili et al., 2021). Nevertheless, EI research has found that some educators can mitigate their stress (Kaur et al., 2019). EI enables the tutor to develop their positivity, find job satisfaction, and inspire those around them, alleviating some of the effects of stress, and it follows that a happy and accomplished tutor will be more efficient at their role than one who is not (Khasawneh et al., 2022).

Developing EI early in a tutor’s career is also likely to be a mitigating factor in preventing teacher fatigue due to stress. Research into educator training (Platsidou, 2010) has indicated that this is most effective when delivered within the training stage at the beginning of the tutor’s career, although the point should be made that it should be ongoing to further enhance the educator’s EI at all stages of their working life. Emotionally intelligent educators may also be able to ameliorate their students’ negative emotions to encourage their learning and engagement (Alam & Ahmad, 2018). It follows that when tutors can regulate their emotions and those of their students, they enable the smooth functioning of the VLE, which



may allow harmony between the formal and informal approaches demanded by the online nature of the VLE (Kaur et al., 2019)

It has already been noted that more research is required to facilitate a deeper understanding of the particular emotional issues associated with online learning by Arghode et al. (2022). Their findings endorsed the point made by Quezada et al. (2020), whose research indicated that the quality of online instruction frequently needs to catch up to that of face-to-face collaborative learning. Due to the rapid escalation to online teaching because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact on tutors' stress of working in VLEs has a broader significance than before the pandemic. Tutors who are cognisant of a range of EI skills and strategies may be able to mitigate some of the negative impacts of stress on their emotions. However, being emotionally intelligent may act as a buffer for both teachers (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017) and HE tutors (Lonbani et al., 2023) as EI may negate some of the adverse side effects of stress as EI has been found to have a positive impact on psychological well-being and stress factors (Vesely et al., 2014). Being emotionally intelligent may amplify the tutor's understanding of the emotions present within the VLE and "ultimately influence online instruction and improve student learning" (Arghode et al., 2022, p. 437). The influence that tutor EI has is significant to this research as students' perceptions of their tutor's stress are relatively unknown. This research study aims to discover if the student participants noticed their tutor's stress levels, which may have been considerable due to the combination of the demands of being a tutor, the COVID-19 pandemic, which negatively affected many people's stress levels and the need to deliver teaching in a VLE, whereby working and teaching online was a new and stressful adjunct for many HE teaching staff; but which could have all been masked and negated by the tutor's EI.

### 5.3.8 *Developing the Tutor's Emotional Intelligence*

EI has been thoroughly investigated in pre- or in-service teacher training (Dolev & Leshem, 2017; Gilar-Corbi et al., 2019; Quezada et al., 2020; Vesely et al., 2014). Further research into EI in an educational context has focussed on the attributes of emotionally intelligent trainee teachers (Gilar-Corbi et al., 2019) and has considered how EI training may positively affect the trainee's abilities to control stress and manage their well-being (Vesely et al., 2014). Research has also considered whether trainee teachers' EI may predict future performance (Corcoran & Tormey, 2013; Farh et al., 2012). Researchers have considered the positive impact that being emotionally intelligent has on in-service teachers' practices, such as reflection (Ferdosipour & Salimi, 2023), the effect on teacher attributes such as self-efficacy (Wang, 2022; Wu et al., 2019) or intercultural intelligence (Dallman, 2022).

Previous research has shown the importance of tutor EI in face-to-face settings as it has been found to significantly impact tutors' classroom behaviour, which can lead to better academic student achievements (Khassawneh et al., 2022; Tevdovska, 2017). The study by Dolev and Leshem (2017) with high school teachers found that a teaching workforce with demonstrably high EI levels could benefit the student body, as student-teacher relations were improved by increasing teacher EI, which also increased teacher effectiveness. Although their study was small and they suggested caution in interpreting their results, their study indicated that face-to-face teaching was improved by greater teacher EI levels. It has been pointed out that tutor-student interactions in online lectures should be consistent with face-to-face tutoring and not adversely impact student outcomes (Quezada, 2020). Nevertheless, little empirical research considers whether tutor EI affects students in online learning contexts, despite recommendations to investigate VLE tutor practices and the interaction between EI and teaching praxis by Awwad (2022), who considered EI effective in encouraging teaching and learning in VLEs.

Furthermore, the academic calls for EI training for teachers and tutors appear to have been ignored. Although in Greece (a country that has incorporated EI training), researchers have found it to be a helpful adjunct for pre-service teachers (Kyriazopoulou & Pappa, 2023). Neither many tutors themselves nor their HE workplaces appear to be engaged in training practices to increase tutor EI. This research study aims to add to the body of evidence to enable tutors and HE institutions to see the benefits of engaging with the calls from academia to develop and increase tutor EI.

Research has also considered the role of EI in HE tutors in preventing burnout (Cohen & Abedallah, 2015; Teles et al., 2020), EI's impact on tutor performance (Bibi et al., 2022), effective teaching (Kaur et al., 2019) and self-efficacy (Ali et al., 2017). The prior research has demonstrated the positive impact of EI on tutors, and individuals who possess differing levels of EI. Notwithstanding, prior research has demonstrated that targeted instruction and training can increase an individual's EI (Côté, 2014; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Specific EI competencies can be taught (Berenson et al., 2008) and are effective in helping individuals develop a range of EI qualities (Majeski et al., 2017). The work by Brackett and Katulak (2013) and Vesely et al. (2014) demonstrated that EI training could enhance stress resistance, which is particularly effective at preventing early career educator burnout. Puertas-Molero et al. (2018) also indicated that HE tutors' mental well-being was improved due to being emotionally intelligent, which was significant in burnout prevention. Furthermore, EI has been considered to be essential in the tutor's arsenal of skills by different HE research teams (Ali et al., 2017; Kaur et al., 2019; Khassawneh et al., 2022) who have suggested that an equal amount of attention should be spent developing an emotionally intelligent skillset as on that of pedagogy or subject knowledge.

It has also been recommended that institutions offer appropriate training to HE tutors to ensure “effective teaching and superior performance” (Kaur et al., 2019, p. 189). Research by Yin (2015) demonstrated that modules concentrating on helping teachers increase their EI would also increase their effectiveness. Similarly, Vesely et al. (2014) found that training to increase EI capabilities will augment and improve self-efficacy and should be viewed as a valuable commodity for pre-service tutors due to its ability to foster the tutor’s well-being. A short EI intervention on reflective emotional journalling by Kyriazopoulou and Pappa (2023) with participants enrolled in Greek pre-service teacher training suggested that increased emotion recognition and the potential for increased emotional regulation were the possible beneficial outcomes. However, Wu et al. (2019) noted caution when they advised that educators’ EI training should be offered within a teaching context as EI will help improve tutor performance only when it utilises an emotional skill set. Youde (2020) added that retraining staff to adopt emotionally intelligent practices might prove costly for HE institutions who need to choose their staff with care, indicating that the earlier trainee HE educators engage with EI training, the more employable they may become.

Psychology research has suggested that EI improves with age (Chen et al., 2016) and that older educators have greater EI levels and control over regulating emotions (Berenson et al., 2008). Similarly, research by Kaur et al. (2019) suggested that less experienced educators may need to acquire the skill of emotion regulation in the workplace. Their findings indicated that, as teachers age, they may become more level-headed and composed, enabling them to focus more on their students’ emotional requirements. Thus, more mature, emotionally intelligent educators find connecting to their students easier as they better understand their needs. Khassawneh et al. (2022) found that this understanding develops alongside increasing EI levels and suggested that academics favour training for early career and newly established tutors to assist them in developing their EI skills and training programmes that focus on EI to

nurture more emotionally intelligent educators. Their calls reiterated those of Uniyal and Rawat (2020), who suggested that enabling teaching professionals to develop their EI would assist them in dealing effectively with the challenges associated with being a teacher.

A parallel can be found in systems research by Gill et al. (2015), who indicated that such EI training could be accomplished by utilising a self-awareness engine of growth model approach. However, any such training would have to compete with other demands on the tutor's time (such as safeguarding training) and the institution's budget, and it may not be viewed as a priority by either institutions or individual tutors as, despite repeated calls for it to be included, it has not been universally adopted. The participants in this study were all students whom an EI tutor had taught and had first-hand experience of how their tutor's EI enabled her to be aware of their emotional needs. This research will add the students' views of the tutor's EI to the current knowledge and, in this way, may help to encourage tutors and tutor trainers to increase their intellectual and emotional intelligence capacity through initial and ongoing EI training and further highlight the importance of such training to HE institutions and reiterate the calls of prior research teams such as Arghode et al. (2022) and Kaur et al. (2019) for formal EI training for tutors.

### ***5.3.9 Emotionally Intelligent Females***

In feminine cultures or work environments where females are predominantly seen as caring or nurturing, it is particularly evident that emotional intelligence (EI) impacts their attitudes toward others and their performance (Miao et al., 2021). However, this could be attributed to stereotypical gender behaviours. Historically, early EI studies (Brackett et al., 2006) using the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2003) demonstrated gender score differences, and later studies revealed that females perform better in certain aspects of EI tests than males (Van Rooy et al., 2005), who also factored in age and ethnicity. These findings were

supported by Whitman et al. (2009), who found that across gender and ethnicity, females performed marginally better than males in EI assessments. Furthermore, female tutors have been found to be less pragmatic and more sentimental, an EI facet that provides emotionally intelligent tutors with an advantage in connecting with and supporting their students, particularly female students (Abukhait et al., 2020). Kaur et al. (2019, p. 199) reinforce this point by stating that “females are emotionally more sensitive and less practical. Hence, emotionally intelligent female teachers may understand their students better and be more empathetic towards them.” However, Yuksekbilgili et al. (2016) noted caution in their findings that females are more emotionally intelligent than males and suggested that age is a factor in increasing EI.

Not all studies have found a difference between males and females in EI. Fischer et al. (2018) questioned whether gender alone accounts for variations in EI, a point reinforced by Shehzad and Mahmood (2013), who found male and female university teachers to be equal in EI, though females exhibited stronger interpersonal skills. Similarly, Ali and Ali (2016) found that gender differences were mediated by age, cautioning against assuming gender is an independent predictor of EI. Papoutsis et al. (2022) also found no general difference in EI across genders, while Tommasi et al. (2023) reported that females excelled in perceiving and understanding emotions, whereas males exhibited greater resilience and impulse control. More recently, a qualitative study of primary school teachers (Rohmah & Karya, 2024) found minimal gender differences in EI, though experienced male teachers showed slightly higher EI. This range of findings has led to ongoing debate about gender’s role in EI, with some researchers attributing higher EI levels to females and others questioning whether such beliefs reinforce gender stereotypes (Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2012).

Martínez-Marín et al. (2021) offer a possible explanation for these contradictory findings, arguing that prior studies did not account for gender as an independent variable. Their research introduces the concept of self-gender, suggesting that it is not biological sex but rather identification with femininity that influences EI. This perspective is particularly relevant to my study, which explores female students' perspectives of their emotionally intelligent female online tutor. The students' experiences align with the notion that EI is not merely a function of gender but is instead shaped by relational and contextual factors. They valued their tutor's ability to express empathy, regulate emotions, and create an emotionally supportive learning environment—qualities often associated with femininity but not necessarily exclusive to female tutors. Additionally, as age has been suggested as a contributing factor to EI (Cabello et al., 2016), it is worth considering whether more experienced tutors develop greater emotional regulation and interpersonal sensitivity over time. While this study is not longitudinal and thus does not account for EI development over time, it does highlight how students perceive and engage with emotionally intelligent tutors in digital learning spaces.

#### ***5.3.10 Emotionally Intelligent Potential Communities of Practice***

An institutional setting's culture has been found by Alam and Ahmad (2018) to directly affect teachers' morale and enthusiasm for their roles, and teachers with higher EI levels create stronger within-school cultures, positively impacting their students' achievements. Similarly, emotionally intelligent tutors working in VLEs may be able to develop positive virtual cultures within their cohorts of students, which could have corresponding morale and achievement-boosting properties. Research by Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017) found that tutors who can modulate their interactions with students due to their increased EI will encourage an environment of cooperation within the learning space, positively impacting the students' enjoyment and learning. Their findings are relevant for this

research as emotionally intelligent tutors could also transfer this ability and use it to encourage cooperation in the VLE.

The research by Alam and Ahmad (2018) and Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017) further demonstrates that EI assists in utilising the ability to create a positive classroom culture with appropriate emotional levels, which directly impacts the learning environment. However, their research was not conducted in VLEs. This thesis considers whether the skills and abilities of emotionally intelligent tutors could overcome the obstacles that working in the VLE presents, which could result in similar outcomes to both Alam and Ahmad's (2018) and Asrar-ul-Haq et al.'s (2017) face-to-face studies.

Dolev and Leshem (2017) found that developing teachers' EI levels enables teachers to enthuse and motivate themselves and may allow them to help their students control their negative outlooks and, as a result, create learning spaces that cultivate erudition. The significance of their research for this study is that emotionally intelligent tutors working in a VLE could be similarly enthusiastic and self-motivational and use those qualities to help their online students. EI tutors may be able to create VLEs that foster erudite knowledge transfer in a similar way to the findings of Ali et al. (2017), who found that high tutor EI levels improve self-efficacy for VLE tutors or Kaur et al. (2019), whose findings indicated that tutor EI increases emotional competencies which increase effective teaching in the VLE. There is the possibility for the student and tutor participants in a VLE to be termed a community of practice, wherein there is a way of becoming an online tutor or student (Wenger, 1999). Generally, a community of practice (CoP) is formed by people who regularly interact over a group venture. They are founded on a combination of three principles:

- They meet within a particular domain. In this instance, the VLE.



- They form a community where the members join in and work towards a common goal.
- They develop a unique practice, a shared way of being and doing, that the members are both aware of and engage with.

The three elements developed over time by the participants are beneficial spaces of dialogue, interpretation, and alignment, which are uniquely individual to that particular group (Roberts, 2006).

A CoP is a form of situational learning that relies on social interactions (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the context of a VLE, these interactions are crucial for facilitating learning. A CoP is most often associated with informal learning and development and for professionals to share best practices, whereby experienced practitioners introduce newer members to the particular practices within that community (Dong et al., 2021). The CoP theory is useful in this study in exploring the dynamic of being a learner in a VLE and the potential formation of a COP within the cohort. The student participants were unexpectedly put into VLEs, instead of the anticipated face-to-face instruction and had to adapt. They had to find ways of being online students and work to develop a learning community within their cohorts, drawing on the experience of their tutor.

Virtual CoP (VCoP) have been documented since the 1990s (Lardier Jr et al., 2024). Elsayed (2021) found that a VCoP of student teachers increased their empathy and self-esteem as a result of their EI. Within a VLE, the VCoP could emerge due to the tutor's EI and their ability to be a structuring resource (Wenger, 1999) instigating and maintaining the language and habits of the learners. Gunasekara et al. (2022) suggested that student engagement and academic learning in the VLE were directly impacted by the tutor's EI level. By building empathetic and caring connections with the students, tutors can create a VLE

where students feel safe to participate freely. Gunasekara et al.'s (2022) study indicated that the tutor's EI could facilitate this, and that the student's perception of trust was built and maintained through relaxed and open discussions during the tutoring session. This reinforces the findings of Majeski et al. (2017), who advocated that online course tutors model EI abilities to encourage learner interest and participation by using motivational strategies to facilitate safe learning spaces. These prior studies will be considered to illuminate the tutor's practices and indicate the ability of the students' cohorts to develop into Potential VCoP (PVCoP) facilitated by the tutor. By examining how a tutor's EI influences the formation and effectiveness of PVCoPs within VLEs, this study can contribute to understanding how EI impacts online learning communities. This approach aligns with the theoretical frameworks discussed and explores the interplay between EI, PVCoPs, and student engagement in virtual learning settings.

#### **5.4. Summary of Chapter Five: The Literature Review**

Tutor training may ensure parity of knowledge and training for all tutors within a particular culture; however, different skills and attitudes are required to transmit knowledge successfully, particularly when interfaced online (Khassawneh et al., 2022). Being a knowledgeable subject teacher does not automatically make for an effective online tutor, as the smooth dissemination of knowledge in the VLE involves attitudes and skills greatly influenced by an individual's EI (Kaur et al., 2019). As has been demonstrated by previous research (Alam & Ahmad, 2018), positive school cultures can be built and maintained by having an emotionally intelligent teacher who can facilitate positive learning spaces; this research will consider if, similarly when working within a VLE, an emotionally intelligent tutor may also be able to enable a positive learning experience for HE students.

EI positively impacts emotions, and culture has a similarly strong moderating effect on emotional display (Arghode et al., 2022). Emotionally intelligent tutors should be able to interpret and understand their students' emotional displays within the VLE (Khassawneh et al., 2022). At the same time, intercultural students may well express and display their emotions differently within the VLE. Research suggests that an emotionally intelligent tutor will be cognisant and understanding towards their intercultural students, valuing their feelings and able to make the students feel at ease (Arghode et al., 2022).

The context of working and being within a VLE may significantly impact the participants' emotional responses and displays; emotionally intelligent tutors can modulate not only their own but also their students' emotional responses (Khassawneh et al., 2022). Harmonious working relationships can be fostered within the department by having emotionally intelligent employees (D'Souza et al., 2023) who can manage the impact of their stress levels to create VLEs where the students can realise their full potential unhindered by the remote delivery of the lesson (Arghode et al., 2022). EI positively impacts tutors' performance (Kaur et al., 2019) and self-efficacy, enabling tutors to improve student outcomes (Wu et al., 2019). EI is not fixed or static, and even without specific targeted training, EI will increase with maturity (Chen et al., 2016; Kaur et al., 2019; Khassawneh et al., 2022) and was found by Cabello et al. (2016) to increase for females as they matured. It has also been documented that the correct training can positively impact a tutor's EI levels and subsequent performance (Dolev & Leshem, 2017; Majeski et al., 2017), regardless of age.

It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic hugely impacted teaching and learning on a global scale (Răducu & Stănculescu, 2021) as a result of the need to limit face-to-face contact (Hancock, 2020). COVID-19 was found to negatively impact HE students and

their tutors as a result of repeated lockdowns and the ensuing isolation, which was found to be the cause of higher stress and anxiety levels and feelings of depression (Day et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020; Toprak & Tunc, 2022). This research study commenced during the lockdowns; the participants and their tutor had been having weekly synchronous VLE sessions together and could have all been affected by the stressful situation they found themselves in. This study considers whether the tutor's stress level affected the VLE or the participants themselves, as no prior research has been conducted to understand student perceptions of how well the tutor can use their EI to mask their stress in a VLE and the impact that this has on the students themselves.

The repeated calls for pre-service tutors to receive EI training (Abou Assali & Riskus, 2023; Bibi et al., 2022; Dewaele et al., 2018; Gilar-Corbi et al., 2019; Quezada et al., 2020) suggest that while tutors may be naturally or, indeed, highly emotionally intelligent, very few have had training on utilising their EI, or specifically its use in a VLE context and this should be considered alongside the findings and recommendations that follow later in this thesis. EI has been found to positively affect every aspect of a tutor's role (Khassawneh et al., 2022), which is magnified when the tutor works remotely in a synchronous VLE, as highlighted in this literature review. It follows that emotionally intelligent tutors could be better able to understand their students' emotions and facilitate meeting their students' needs in VLEs, as found by Arghode et al.'s (2022) review of EI and VLE instruction, but the current knowledge is missing the impact of this on the students in a VLE.

The primary teaching skills and attributes of subject knowledge, practical tutoring skills, and teaching attitude remain inadequate in guaranteeing effective teaching in the VLE. The literature has suggested that EI could be the missing link to ensuring success (Kaur et al., 2019), as effective tutoring requires a skillset that exceeds the mere transfer of knowledge

and requires tutors who have developed a range of emotionally intelligent abilities (Vesely et al., 2014). Therefore, tutors in VLEs, due to the barriers to delivery and understanding created by the technology, are in greater need of an EI skillset.

This review has considered the literature surrounding the topic of emotional intelligence and its relevance to the teaching and particularly tutoring profession and established that emotionally intelligent educators would appear to be better equipped to cope with the myriad demands placed upon them. The discussion then considered the EI abilities that VLE tutors could benefit from and their potential impact on their students. This literature review has also discussed the lack of research surrounding the students' views of their emotionally intelligent VLE tutors and established this as a gap in current knowledge that this thesis addresses. The significance of this research for student attainment in VLEs and satisfaction with tutor performance should not be underestimated following the recent global shift to remote methods of instruction.

Having presented and discussed the second half of the literature review, this research study now moves on to Chapter Six for the closing discussion, conclusions, and study limitations.

## **6. Chapter Six: Data Interpretation and Discussion**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This synergistic phenomenological approach (SPA) research study explored how a group of female students perceived that they had experienced the phenomenon of having an emotionally intelligent female tutor in a virtual learning environment (VLE). This small-scale, qualitative research study aimed to understand and fill the gap in knowledge of the impact an emotionally intelligent tutor may have on her students in a VLE by comprehending the students' experiences. The research method was novel as it used a qualitative SPA to explore the third-person (the participants') perceptions of another's (the tutor's) emotional intelligence.

This chapter begins with a reminder of the research questions leading to the discussion, which links Chapter Four's findings to Chapter Five's literature review. A summary of the findings and an evaluation of their significance follow. Then, there is an overview of the research and a résumé of the context of the study. Thereafter, the original contributions to expanding knowledge, an evaluation of the SPA, and pertinent recommendations for higher education (HE) tutors and higher educational institutions (HEIs) are presented. Finally, the research study's limitations and a reflection close the chapter.

### **6.2. The Research Questions**

To guide the research, following prior phenomenological studies' examples (van Manen, 2016a), whose questions focus on the experiences of the participants, this research considered one primary and one secondary research question:

- How do students recognise and experience the tutor's emotional intelligence in synchronous online learning contexts?

- How do students recognise and value the tutor's emotional intelligence levels in synchronous online learning contexts?

Both questions were considered using the previously highlighted working definition of EI, which is the identification of emotions in oneself and others, the self-management of emotional states and the ability to enable others to do the same (Vaida & Opre, 2014). The following discussion is framed around the research questions and considers the crucial findings of this study related to student perceptions of their tutor's EI, which are compared and linked to the significant literature discovered in the literature review.

### **6.3. Discussion and Interpretation of the Data Contrasted with the Literature**

Tutor EI has gained much attention in educational research from the point of view of performance (Khassawneh et al., 2022), tutor self-efficacy (Ali et al., 2017), increasing tutor intercultural competencies (Arghode et al., 2022) and the impact on their students (Maamari & Salloum, 2023). However, the views of the students of EI tutors in VLEs have been overlooked, and this study's findings address that shortfall.

The data analysis further revealed four superordinate themes, which were comprised of twelve subordinate themes:

- Encouragement (rapport, clarification, and empathy)
- Interpersonal Relationships (active listening, inclusivity and relationship building)
- Approachability (adaptability, self-regulation, and conflict management)
- Interest in Others (eye contact, non-verbal communication, and voice modulation).

The conceptualisation of emotional intelligence is complex and multi-faceted. The four superordinate themes have been categorised as this study's conception of emotional intelligence. However, the previous conceptions of EI have been understood to categorise

different competencies, but there is an acknowledgement that they work together as all the various competencies are synergistic. Thus, the headings used in this chapter overlap areas within the broad, overarching concept of EI.

The following discussion and interpretation of the data considers the relationship between the literature review and the data. It discusses the areas of significance to this phenomenological research, with the discourse presenting a dialogue between the previous field of literature (see Chapters Two and Five) and the data (see Chapter Four). A body of evidence is provided around this concept to acknowledge its importance in promoting effective teaching and learning in VLEs. The superordinate and subordinate themes are compared to the previous research explored in the literature review to understand better what it means to be a student taught by an emotionally intelligent tutor in a VLE. The superordinate and subordinate constructs are used and understood relative to the broader concept of the *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) of being a student of an emotionally intelligent tutor studying in a *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) of a VLE and discussed under the following headings, which are interpreted as being the aims of this research:

- VLE Students Require Encouragement and Support from Emotionally Intelligent Tutors,
- An Emotionally Intelligent Tutor Builds a Rapport with Students within the VLE,
- Interpersonal Tutor-Student Relationships are Built on Social and Emotionally Intelligent Interactions and Mutual Positive Regard in the VLE,
- The Tutor's Self-Efficacy and Adaptability Towards the Students in the VLE,
- The Tutor's Emotional Intelligence and Performance as an Ability to Conflict Manage in the VLE,
- The Emotional Self-Regulation of the VLE Tutor and Its Impact on Students



- An Emotionally Intelligent Tutor Demonstrates Inclusivity Towards the Intercultural Students in the VLE,
- The Emotionally Intelligent Tutor Masks their Stress Levels in the VLE,
- The Tutor's Emotional Intelligence Impacts the VLE Students' Academic Outcomes
- An Emotionally Intelligent Female Tutor Displays Empathy Towards her Students in the VLE and
- Emotionally Intelligent Tutors build Beneficial Potential Student Communities of Practice within the VLE by Incorporating Non-Verbal Communication.

These aims are now expanded in the following discussion.

### ***6.3.1 VLE Students Require Encouragement and Support from Emotionally Intelligent Tutors***

A primary theme of discussion for the participants was the amount of encouragement they experienced while studying in the VLE with the tutor. Each participant revealed that the tutor's level of encouragement was important to them. Most mentioned that their emotional *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) was one of uncertainty as they were unsure of their capabilities at the start of the module and were affected by the limitations of face-to-face meetings caused by the then-ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Hancock, 2020). Still, the tutor's unwavering encouragement reassured them and supported them:

I am confident I could talk to my lecturer ask them questions regardless of whatever question I want to ask. When there is not enough time, she tells you to book a tutorial.

(i)

She said, 'Stop stressing' and those kinds of things really to try and put my mind at ease. (iii)

The quantitative research by Slåtten et al. (2021) revealed that emotions might profoundly impact HE students, their aptitude for learning and their academic achievement; these emotions may be heightened in a VLE due to the remote delivery. Consequently, tutors who can support and encourage students through their emotional responses in the VLE may be able to improve their students' cognition and ability to learn. Others' emotional appraisal (OEA) was shown to be an essential component of EI (see 2.8.2) and is a helpful tutoring ability, particularly in the more difficult remote working conditions of the VLE. For the tutor, OEA incorporating their EI to appraise the students' emotions quickly, then modelling appropriate emotional responses and acting accordingly, would be helpful in the fast-paced VLE with moving screens and fleeting glimpses of speaking participants. The tutor's ability to perform OEA echoes the recommendations of Majeski et al. (2017), who said that EI was essential in fostering the ability to work with others in VLEs and other career roles. Having an EI tutor who could assess the students' emotions rapidly and effectively help them manage their emotional states was consistent with the quantitative study findings of Naqvi et al. (2016), who found that for secondary school teachers, there are strong links between EI and the classroom climate which directly influences student progress. The tutor's unwavering encouragement was appreciated by the participants, as is demonstrated here by iv, who said about the tutor and her fellow students:

*(The tutor was skilled at) Putting people at ease and not letting them start to panic, and it's natural to, you know, 'cause they are in a new situation. (iv)*

EI positively impacts social interactions (Jacob et al., 2016; Lopes et al., 2004). Roles involving frequent interactions, such as tutoring, have previously been found to be ameliorated by having EI (Arghode et al., 2022). This research study has revealed that the tutor embarked cheerfully on the myriad interactions with the students in the VLE and that

the students appreciated the “listening ear” (Participant i) the tutor used in their sessions. The implication is that the tutor focused on the VLE students and was always ready to add further encouragement, explanation, or praise to the students’ interactions. This ‘listening ear’ (Participant i) became an essential component of the tutor-student relationship, as the data revealed that the students needed the tutor to be present synchronously, aware of them and attuned to their needs to validate their participation. The increased involvement of the students led to their more significant engagement with the module and perhaps contributed to their subsequent academic success.

Within VLEs, the traditional role of the tutor-student relationship is changed and channelled into something warmer and more caring, becoming, as Kaur et al. (2019, p. 189) note, that of a “mentor-friend”. This research corroborates Kaur et al.’s (2019) findings in the way the tutor used the students’ names to personalise her questions and tried to encourage the infrequent attendees and more reticent students to participate. The data suggests that the tutor’s support and encouragement of them became integral to how the participants experienced the tutor’s EI and demonstrated how the tutor developed her “mentor-friend” (Kaur et al., 2019, p. 189) relationships with the participants. The data also indicates that the tutor humanised the students, elevating them from mere attendees on a tick-box list to fellow humans with thoughts and opinions whose academic outcomes mattered to her. Thus, it could be concluded that the tutor’s EI was integral to supporting and encouraging the participants and ensuring that they felt their *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) of being a student in a VLE was productive and academically successful.

### **6.3.2 *An Emotionally Intelligent Tutor Builds a Rapport with their Students within the VLE***

Some twenty years ago, work by Jordan and Troth (2004) highlighted that an employee’s EI directly impacts their workplace, particularly when the work environment is

virtual. Having an educational workforce working in a virtual environment with an apparent EI is advantageous, as EI positively benefits roles, such as tutoring, based on social interaction (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014). More recently, Arghode et al. (2022) reflected in their literature review that having an emotionally intelligent tutor can enable a rapport to be built and maintained between the tutor and the students in synchronous VLEs. The participants endorsed Arghode et al.'s (2022) findings as they described how carefully the tutor built a rapport with them in the VLE. In this study, the rapport and connection between tutor and student were built on social and emotional interactions, which have previously been found to be essential for effective tutoring and student outcomes by Kyriakides et al. (2013) in their meta-study analysis of teaching factors.

Participant iv identified how the tutor built a rapport with the cohort by sharing their experiences of being a student, which indicates that this humanised her to the students and could have been an empowering experience for them. The tutor effectively implied that she was a student once, too, and the students could become tutors like her; the students were studying educator training courses with the tutor, so this could have been important to the aspirations of the participants.

She had been there, and she could remember what some of us were feeling. (iv)

Building a rapport with the students can be considered enabling, as the quantitative HE tutor's performance research by Khassawneh et al. (2022) revealed that students of emotionally intelligent tutors can feel empowered to ask questions of the tutor due to the tutor's ability to be empathetic and understanding of the students' *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) and emotional needs. The participants in this study endorsed Khassawneh et al.'s research as they described how they experienced the tutor's EI and felt enabled to ask her as many questions as they needed to build their knowledge and understanding of a concept:

It's encouraging someone to ask more questions so *(they)* want to get more clarified about things. (i)

The tutor's rapport and encouraging enablement allowed the students to grasp and develop their ideas, potentially empowering their academic understanding of the different concepts. The tutor's sympathetic personal connection was also evident in the written feedback given to the students, where each student felt like an individual who mattered and was known to the tutor, as highlighted by Participant v:

It amazes me how many students and how much marking the tutor will have, and they actually personalise yours, and they make you feel that she really does remember me. (v)

By personalising the marking of the student's work, the tutor maintained the rapport built in the VLE and, in this way, demonstrated an understanding of the student's *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) and emotions. This finding is consistent with that of Dolev and Leshem (2017), who concluded that tutor EI positively impacts high school teacher-student relationships and implies that all emotionally intelligent educators could utilise their EI in the same way. Ensuring the continuity of the rapport between the students and herself, perhaps facilitated by her EI, was an effective way to maintain the students' engagement and build their rapport and tutor-student relationship within the VLE.

### ***6.3.3 Interpersonal Tutor-Student Relationships are Built on Socially Emotionally Intelligent Interactions and Mutual Positive Regard in the VLE***

Giles' (2018) academic work has explored educational, relational leadership and revealed that social interactions are the foundation for teaching and learning in the VLE, as education is relational; indeed, teaching has been said to be characteristically social and a profession often chosen by individuals who are socially driven (Hattie, 2009). In this study, the social interactions in the VLE between the tutor and participants appeared to be essential

to the participants, as they built mutual regard (Rogers, 1957) between the tutor and the students, which positively impacted the students' *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970). Lopes et al. (2004) found in their quantitative study that EI ameliorated student-social interactions; their findings were reinforced by Dallman (2022), whose research found that teacher EI enables positive teacher-pupil social dynamics. Social interactions will assume greater importance within a VLE where remote access makes remaining focussed on tasks more challenging. Thus, the previous research by Gunasekara et al. (2022), which suggests that social interactions in the VLE depend on having an emotionally intelligent tutor to facilitate them, has proved significant for this study. Participant v acknowledged the need for mutual regard between the student and the tutor (Rogers, 1957) as part of their social interactions, their impact on the student, and their engagement with the module:

I think we built a relationship, and I think we had a rapport, and she was genuine and genuinely interested and obviously genuinely wanted you to do well. (v)

Her view of the tutor, formed during the weekly sessions in the VLE, was that of an interested friend who was concerned for the outcome of her students and sincere in her social interactions with them. The sincerity forms the basis of the mutual concern shared between the tutor and the student. Psychology researchers have contended that relationships are constructed on degrees of concern, which may be viewed from negative to unconditional mutual positive regard (Bozarth, 2013; Wouters et al., 2018).

Unconditional positive regard involves supporting others regardless of their actions and helps to build their self-worth (Rogers, 1957). Both tutors and students require self-worth as it is needed to self-actualise and fuel the self-belief to accomplish academic goals, and it possibly assumes greater importance for students in their first VLE sessions when there is a need to find a way to be a virtual student. Mutual regard facilitated by the tutor in the first

instance appears to be an essential facet of the social skillset of EI, and it is integral to building relationships (Cherniss, 2010). Previous quantitative research studying teachers' EI by Dallman (2022) (junior schools) and Dolev and Leshem (2017) (senior schools) has documented the positive impact on the students of a teacher's EI, and it can be seen here by the Participant v's empathetic repetition of the word genuine, the effect the tutor's EI has had on her. Her emphasis indicates that she does not doubt the sincerity or the genuineness of her tutor's regard and suggests the warmth of their tutor-student relationship. This finding reinforces Dallman's (2022) and Dolev & Leshem's (2017) research that emotionally intelligent tutors positively impact tutor-student relationships and indicates that the tutor-student relationships in the VLE as described by the participants were built on mutual positive regard facilitated by the tutor's EI.

#### ***6.3.4 The Tutor's Self-Efficacy and Adaptability Towards the Students in the VLE***

Social cognitive theory defines self-efficacy as the belief an individual perceives themselves to have to accomplish a task (Bandura, 1986); it is a mediating factor between ability and behavioural outcomes. Self-efficacy is an internal construct that provides the impetus to succeed at a task and the associated cognitive processes (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) (see 2.5.4). Self-efficacy is linked to an individual's specific ability-belief system (Bandura, 1986); tutors who believe they have been successful anticipate further success in the future and their self-efficacy rates are increased (and vice-versa). In this way, teacher performance becomes the foundation for further self-efficacy.

It is important to note that the participants did not explicitly mention the tutor's self-efficacy. The students frequently cited the COVID-19 pandemic and global unease concerning their worries about their competence to be online students and achieve their academic goals. However, the participants did not mention these factors regarding the tutor,

who was also experiencing the same upheaval in her life, with potentially similar worries and concerns about her ability to tutor in a VLE and enable the students to achieve similar academic outcomes to those they could have had from face-to-face instruction. The fact that the tutor was able to appear every week with an outwardly calm demeanour, to be engaging, and to be student-focused is indicative of her self-efficacy. The students described the reliability and dependability of the tutor, her belief in their capabilities, and how she constantly encouraged them to succeed in their academic endeavours by telling them that they could achieve their goals, indicating that these capabilities are enhanced by being emotionally intelligent.

The data in this study indicates that the tutor has self-belief in her ability to impart knowledge and enable learning and understanding to take place within the VLE. Bandura (1977) argued that if an individual does not believe they can do something, then it is unlikely that they will succeed. Self-efficacy beliefs can be said to be the crucial cause of human behaviours and endeavours. Zee & Koomen's (2016) analysis of 165 articles found that students whose teachers have self-efficacy in their capabilities achieve better academically than those whose tutors have little or no self-efficacy due to its positive impact on their students. Students of emotionally intelligent tutors have also been found to have greater self-esteem and belief in their capabilities, and the tutor's EI and self-efficacy have been found to be positively linked to student achievement by Alam and Ahmad (2018). This research study indicates further corroboration to Zee & Koomen's (2016) findings when the words of Participant v are considered but does so from the added context of the impact of the VLE:

So, yeah, yeah, I was actually pleasantly surprised because you do an estimate in your head, don't you? You think I'm going to get this rough score, and then it comes in higher, and you're pleased and surprised. (iv)



Participant iv indicates that her academic outcome surpassed her expectations as she illuminated the student's practice of forecasting eventual marks and indicated she anticipated a lower score than was gained. Her delight in her better-than-anticipated grade was apparent when she repeated the word 'yeah' using it for emphasis. Her self-efficacy could be considered low, as she did not anticipate the grade she received. The higher grade is linked to the tutor's self-efficacy and her belief in her ability as a tutor to transfer knowledge successfully despite being in a VLE. The student participants experienced the tutor's EI and self-efficacy in diverse ways, but most mentioned the adaptability of the tutor:

She gives them room to answer questions. (i)

Yeah, she was really adaptable with the timings as well. You know it didn't matter if you were a little bit late. (iii)

She did adapt it, but I think her sole purpose was to get us thinking for ourselves. (iv)

Răducu and Stănculescu's (2021) research indicated that EI and self-efficiency mediate teachers' adaptability to online teaching and enable them to deliver quality online instruction, the findings from this research study endorse and expand their work. It would appear that the HE tutor could also use her EI and self-efficacy to be adaptable whilst working in the VLE and deliver high-quality instruction to her students. The tutor's flexible approach towards them enabled the participants' *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) to become relaxed and productive. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Răducu and Stănculescu (2021), Zee & Koomen (2016), and Wu et al. (2019). EI and self-efficacy positively mediate tutors' adaptability and teaching performance. As a result, emotionally intelligent, self-efficacious tutors' students are more likely to succeed in their academic endeavours. This SPA research indicates that the tutor's EI and self-efficacy in the VLE were implicated in the

participants' educational outcomes and that the tutor used her EI and self-efficacy to be adaptable in her dealings with the participants in the VLE.

### ***6.3.5 The Tutor's Emotional Intelligence and Performance as an Ability to Conflict Manage in the VLE***

Previous research by Kaur et al. (2018;2019) has established that tutor attitudes and performance are positively impacted by their EI levels and less impacted by subject knowledge or pedagogic practices. An aspect of tutor performance is group facilitation skills, whereby the tutor balances their guidance according to their students' needs (Dolmans & Wolfhagen, 2005) and does so to manage potential conflict. The tutor enabled a harmonious working environment within the VLE, with just participant v mentioning experiencing explicit conflict management:

Her voice would change, particularly towards some of the more distracting students.

So, she would then change to kind of pull everybody back into the session (v)

Moreover, Participant ii talked about how the tutor reduced the tension when the class was waiting for a guest speaker who had forgotten they were due to attend the session:

We were all waiting on the call, and they forgot that they were going to be coming in.

And \*\*\*\* is quite tense then because everyone is sat waiting, and then \*\*\*\* managed the situation really well. She emailed him and everything and sent him messages. He was a bit late. (ii)

The limited discussion about any conflict between the students and or the tutor in the interviews indicates the tutor's ability to use her EI to mediate a stable learning environment whilst drawing upon her EI to accomplish this. The lack of conflict allowed the *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) of the students to be one of productive learning within the VLE. The tutor's EI could have been a mediating factor in her emotions and possibly enabled her to have a

tacit understanding of her students' needs in the VLE. Modelling such abilities could allow the students to nurture their own EI like that described by Majeski et al. (2017), enabling the tutor to modulate the students' emotional needs such that minimal dissent was apparent in the VLE. However, when the need arose to restore order, the tutor used her EI, modulating her voice to convey her disapproval and ensure cohesion within the VLE. These findings reinforce the previous research indicating how much EI positively impacts a tutor's job performance by Kaur et al. (2019), and the data in this study suggests that this ability is equally as crucial within a VLE.

### ***6.3.6 The Emotional Self-Regulation of the VLE Tutor and Its Impact on Students***

The data collection focused on the experiences and perceptions of the participants who had their lectures during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time of great uncertainty for humanity and when face-to-face contact was discouraged in England (Hancock, 2020). Globally, universities responded to government curtailment measures by moving to online teaching spaces (Anthony Jnr & Noel, 2021), necessitating significant student and staff changes of the type reported by (Day et al., 2021; Jili et al., 2021), whereby all teaching and learning moved from face-to-face to VLEs. The participants revealed their *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) of that time to be worried and concerned about what was happening globally and what the experience of learning in a VLE would be like:

Our routine had totally gone on us. (v)

The experience of studying in a VLE was new to them all, so their sense of stress was heightened. At the same time, the tutor was living and working through this period of uncertainty but managed to modulate her emotions to appear calm and in control at every session:

She was really focused on the lecture. (ii)

There was that smile, and she would ask how everything had gone this week. I was thinking, ‘I don’t think I could do that’ because you are literally bombarded with questions. (v)

To control her emotional responses, the tutor could have utilised her EI similarly to that described by Khassawneh et al. (2022) in their quantitative investigation into HE tutors’ performance and EI. Their findings indicated that EI impacts many areas of the tutors’ role, and through repetition, tutors become more skilful at self-control. Khassawneh et al.’s (2022) research reiterated the findings of the earlier quantitative research by Minbashian et al. (2018), who also found that self-control may increase over time due to repetition. In this thesis, the results indicated that the more disconnected the students became from their previous lives, the more adept the tutor appeared to become at regulating her emotions as time passed. Thus, the more time the tutor spent in the VLE, despite the researcher’s expectation of the tutor’s stress increasing due to the ongoing pandemic, the more the tutor became skilled at regulating her emotions, which echoes Minbashian et al.’s (2018) findings around repetition of emotional strategies leading to an autonomic response.

The quantitative research on schoolteachers working in VLEs by Răducu and Stănculescu (2021) found that EI will help the teacher’s online presence and adaptability. Teachers and tutors who engage in synchronous discussions with their students in the VLE and who routinely encourage interactive sessions of the type the tutor used, can facilitate relationships and a sense of self-worth, connection, and agency, even in VLEs for the students. To maintain a harmonious working environment through a period of notable change, the tutor demonstrated a skilful use of her EI to regulate her emotional responses and encourage the students to put aside their external worries and participate in the VLE. Thus,

the tutor enabled the students' *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) to be productive and worthwhile in their *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) of the VLE.

### ***6.3.7 An Emotionally Intelligent Tutor Demonstrates Inclusivity Towards the Intercultural Students in the VLE***

A commonly held view of culture is that it incorporates commonalities of behaviour and responses that span generations and provides society with norms of behavioural reactions among people in any given location or within a point in time (DeCuir-Gunby & Williams-Johnson, 2014). It follows that what is an appropriate emotional response in one country or culture may be viewed as being other in another. International students must simultaneously adjust to living away from families and support networks in a foreign country while endeavouring to hit academic targets (Sit et al., 2017) and while learning their host country's societal and social norms and, in this research study, doing so whilst learning within a VLE for the first time.

EI has previously been shown to be culturally determined (Cholewa et al., 2012). A tutor may be emotionally intelligent in their natural, cultural setting and demonstrate a keen awareness of their students' emotional needs, although these emotional cues may be misinterpreted or overlooked when students are from other cultures (Arnold & Lindner-Müller, 2012). This research indicates that EI can form the bridge to enable tutors to notice and be able to interpret a myriad of emotional cues given by their intercultural students. The tutor demonstrated her ease in navigating intercultural differences by ensuring that such differences were not an issue; all the international participants described the tutor's warmth and ease in their dealings with her. This finding reiterated the EI and VLE literature review by Arghode et al. (2022), who suggested that VLE tutors should be aware of how intercultural differences affect students and their emotions. They also indicated that tutors should be able to modify their emotional behaviour to increase student understanding and

learning and that the tutor's EI is the foundation that enables the tutor to perceive and understand intercultural differences (Arghode et al., 2022). The international participants described how they experienced the tutor understanding the difficulties they were experiencing:

\*\*\*\* read her expression (*on her face*) and the way she was like describing the answer, but she realised that maybe she didn't understand it properly, so \*\*\*\* went over it again. (ii)

I felt welcomed and included. (*She made it*) Easier. I would have probably gone into a meltdown a lot sooner. (iii)

Arghode et al.'s review (2022) found that EI is a cornerstone on which understanding of others and their cultures can be built as EI enables a personal knowledge of emotions to be constructed, from which it is possible to understand others. The results of this study revealed the findings to be consistent with Arghode et al.'s findings as the tutor appeared to navigate the online emotional issues to improve the student's understanding and learning. Regardless of their cultural identities, their tutor appeared to engage her EI to include and enable the students. The tutor seemed to have understood the participants' emotional needs and fostered a sense of inclusivity within the VLE. As VLE working becomes more widely accepted and commonplace, it follows that they will accommodate more intercultural students. This research indicates that having tutors whose EI enables them to build and maintain inclusivity can only be regarded as an asset by the students and the faculty that employs the tutor.

#### **6.3.8 The Emotionally Intelligent Tutor Masks their Stress Levels in the VLE**

Tutors have highly stressful jobs (Khassawneh et al., 2022). They must effectively manage their stress levels and monitor their and their students' emotional states (Naqvi et al., 2016) to enable the VLE to be a positive space for erudition and learning (Kaur et al., 2018).

What was apparent from the participants was that despite working in a VLE continuously for the first time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during a time when most people were facing a time of uncertainty and stress, the tutor was careful not to reveal how stressed she perhaps felt to her students:

She did make light of certain things. I'm sure she had her own stuff going on in the background. What came across to me was the consistency of her nature of her emotions. If you like, we got the same \*\*\*\* every time. (iv)

The tutor perhaps could use her EI to limit her discernible stress and counter any negativity expressed by the participants. In this way, everyone's emotional stress levels in the synchronous VLE were better regulated. Jacob et al.'s (2016) research has highlighted the significance of emotionally intelligent individuals being cognisant of understanding body language and interpreting visual and verbal cues, particularly when they are inconsistent. Emotionally intelligent tutors working in VLEs and having this ability would find this a helpful adjunct to their repertoire of skills. The participants reinforced Jacob et al.'s (2016) research and indicated that the tutor could use her EI to alleviate the stress and ensure a harmonious VLE. Engaging her EI in this way confirmed that the students' negative emotions were held in check and that the synchronous VLE was as productive as face-to-face working, which, as Quezada et al. (2020) in their qualitative study of trainee teachers and teacher educators pointed out is not always the case. The level of productivity in the VLE during this study echoes the findings of the EI review by Arghode et al. (2022). Their findings suggested that tutors working in VLEs should notice the effect of learning in a VLE on the students' emotions and be able to engage the students by modifying their behaviour to increase student understanding and learning.

### ***6.3.9 The Tutor's Emotional Intelligence Impacts the VLE Students' Academic Outcomes***

Previous quantitative research with middle school teachers (Wang, 2022) and secondary school teachers (Naqvi et al., 2016) found that teachers' EI impacts student academic achievement. However, although no similar research could be located concerning HE, a quantitative study by Maamari and Salloum (2023) found that HE tutors' EI affects their teaching effectiveness and, therefore, their students' academic achievements. In this research study, one of the participants (i) felt that the tutor's EI had had no impact on her academic achievement. Nevertheless, the remainder were unanimous in their conviction that the tutor's EI had had a significant effect; this is in line with the previous findings from Maamari and Salloum (2023), Naqvi et al. (2016) and Wang (2022). The recent literature review on the impact of teacher EI on students by Abou Assali and Riskus (2023) indicated that emotionally intelligent educators could have an effect on any age of the learner, and this study's findings suggest it applied to the VLE university students in this research study. Participant ii summed up the impact of the tutor's EI on her academic performance:

Yes, in that module, I got my highest score. I was pleased with my grade, and I think it was a bit due to \*\*\*\* because she helped me and included me, and I really enjoyed the module. (ii)

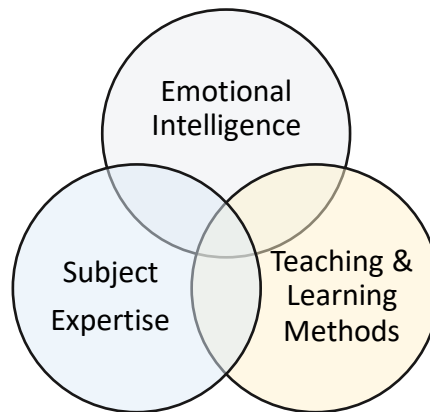
The participants described how the tutor was able to engage and motivate the students, and this allowed them to enjoy the module and meet their academic targets in a more enjoyable way than they had envisioned when they were first introduced to the VLE sessions. The tutor's ability to engage the students reinforces previous research findings that EI tutors can enthuse their students to enable them to perform well (Wu et al., 2019). The reality for the participants was that the good relationships fostered by the tutor's EI helped all of them to achieve their academic goals, which echoes Mortiboys (2012) scholarly work, in



which he surmised that the tutor's EI is as integral to student learning as their teaching methods and subject expertise and which is represented in the Venn Diagram, figure 5 below.

*Figure 5: A Venn Diagram Showing the Relationship Between Tutors' Subject Knowledge, their Pedagogy and EI.*

*Copied from Mortiboys 2013, p 3*



Mortiboys (2013) said that emotions are integral to and irretrievably linked with learning and that all too frequently, the importance of the tutor EI is overlooked, but that it is fundamental in its impact on teaching and learning and without it, the worth of tutor's knowledge and pedagogy were diminished. Mortiboys' (2013) work was reiterated by the findings from Kaur et al. (2019), who reported that EI had a direct positive impact on teaching and that simply possessing academic knowledge does not create successful educators; EI is the missing link. The regular synchronous VLE sessions facilitated by the emotionally intelligent tutor allowed the participants' learning, social and emotional needs to be met. The participants described the tutor's calm, courteous and inclusive approach to the sessions, which enabled the students to relax and maintain focus, allowing each participant to meet her academic learning goals.

### ***6.3.10 An Emotionally Intelligent Female Tutor Displays Empathy Towards Her Students in the VLE.***

The tutor, participants and researcher all identified as female in this study. A feminine-gendered self-concept has been found to be a predictor of being more attentive to emotions by Martínez-Marín et al. (2021) in their quantitative study of university tutors and students, which echoes an earlier study by Joseph and Newman (2010), who found that females scored higher in all dimensions of EI tests. In this small-scale, phenomenological, female-orientated study, the students valued the EI of their tutor, which they encountered while studying in a VLE. The warmth described between the participants and their tutor indicates that the tutor could utilise her EI to connect with and support her students, which supports the previous research by (Kaur et al., 2019), whose findings indicated that EI female tutors have a greater empathy and student understanding than their male counterparts. Participant iii was clear that the tutor constantly displayed her emotionally intelligent capabilities:

I don't think there was ever one lecture where she wasn't showing them attributes.

She demonstrated them all the time. (iii)

The participants' *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) was that of students in a VLE with an empathetic, emotionally intelligent tutor who could utilise her EI to impact her students positively. Again, this reinforces the synergy between the findings from this study and previous research that EI positively impacts attitudes (Miao et al., 2021), particularly those of females (Joseph & Newman, 2010) and those who have a concept of being gendered as female (Martínez-Marín et al., 2021). At the same time, it is noteworthy that this research introduces a novel context for EI research as this study was situated within the experiences of students studying in synchronous VLEs, which, with their remote methods of delivery, make

reading and interpreting body language much harder and therefore the desirability of having an emotionally intelligent tutor appears to be more significant.

### **6.3.11 Emotionally Intelligent Tutor Influences *on Potential* Student Virtual Communities of Practice Incorporating Non-verbal Communication**

Phenomenological research can acknowledge and give credence to the singular voice (Smith et al., 2022; van Manen, 2016b). This study highlights that one participant was intensely aware of the VLE culture; Participant ii described her fellow students as a team. The word team is a descriptor for a group of individuals who work together to achieve an endeavour (Clancey, 1995), which could imply there was the potential for the formation of a community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1999), in this case, within the VLE thus a Virtual CoP (VCoP) (see 5.3.3). CoP theory had not been anticipated to be used in this study however, the participant's words drew the attention of the researcher, and this quote resonated with Wenger's (1999) theory that was used as a lens to understand the participant's particular perspective:

\*\*\*\* understood my emotions; she was warm and caring. It made me feel more like part of the team and to make me feel more confident. So, I felt like I was able to contribute more. (ii)

Participant ii pointed out that her tutor's help allowed her to access the team and become a valid member, indicating that her experiences in the VLE had perhaps resulted in her feeling excluded from the ways of being within the team until her tutor's intervention. Participant ii described her situatedness as being a newcomer to the team and that she needed to learn how to be a member. Lave and Wenger (1991) described everyone as a learner on a trajectory of becoming, and in this case, the participant was becoming an online learner with

the help of the tutor, who was a participant and had observed her experiences as an unwilling outsider. Joining the team allowed the student to grow her confidence and then enabled her to participate more within the VLE; this directly increased her understanding of the topic.

What teachers do and how they interact with and encourage inter-student interaction have been shown to directly impact the learning environment by Kyriakides et al. (2013). The findings in this study were consistent with their prior research and indicate that in VLEs, the tutor has a similar role in constructing a conducive online learning environment. The tutor's EI appeared to enable her to be more aware of the issues Participant ii was experiencing in becoming a member of the team and, by directly intervening, allowed the student to participate. The positive impact of EI on the teacher's ability to affect classroom cultures has been described by Alam and Ahmad (2018). Alam and Ahmad's (2018) quantitative study involving schoolteachers found that the ability to create a positive classroom culture with appropriate emotional levels directly impacts the learning environment of the classroom ecology and that the teacher's EI level facilitates this ability. The effect the HE tutor's EI has on their performance and subsequent student learning has been documented in quantitative research by Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017) and Bibi et al. (2022); both studies indicated that EI has a positive impact on the tutor's performance.

The findings from this qualitative synergistic phenomenological approach research study indicate that an emotionally intelligent tutor may be able to positively impact the VLE to create an environment wherein Potential VCoP (PVCOP) may form with a "positive social-emotional dynamic" (Dallman, 2022, p1) between the tutor and the students. This could echo the findings of Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017) and Bibi et al. (2022) but with the added dimension of being in a VLE. Such positive dynamics have been said to be a crucial aspect of tutor effectiveness (Hattie, 2009) in face-to-face teaching and appear to be as necessary for VLEs.

The team that had emerged and was maintained by the interactions of the students and tutor could increase the likelihood of the more reticent students (like Participant ii) increasing their engagement and subsequent enjoyment and learning in a way similar to the findings of Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017), whose research also indicated that tutor EI is positively linked to better student outcomes. Similarly, the study by Chen et al. (2023) noted that active involvement in VCoP is vital to encourage collaboration and skill building in students and enhance their agency, which was echoed by Participant ii in this research study in her observations about the team.

One way the tutor demonstrated her ability to maintain the team was with non-verbal communication in her role as a tutor-structuring resource for learning (Wenger, 1999). In this way, the tutor becomes a learning tool for the students and enables the students' learning to happen. The tutor's skilful use of non-verbal communication did not go unnoticed by the students and was explained by Participant iii:

She always made eye contact to check when there were no questions or something like that. She would have a look at our overall pictures (On Teams), and if anybody was looking puzzled, she would pick up on it, and she did it to myself, as I must have had a blank expression on my face. (iii)

The EI ability of emotion perception of the self includes accurately expressing verbal and non-verbal emotions (Mayer et al., 2008). Humans express their feelings in various non-verbal ways, such as voice tone and facial expression (Jacob et al., 2016), and with the lack of bodily postures for reinforcement, these non-verbal cues may need to be carefully choreographed and managed within a VLE for advantageous effect. Quantitative research by Jacob et al. (2013) showed that the link between a higher EI and the ability to understand emotions was correlated to non-verbal dominance. This research study indicates that

emotionally intelligent tutors could better manage their emotional displays via non-verbal communication because of their higher EI. The participants shared the diverse ways they experienced their tutor's non-verbal communication:

She keeps a listening ear to people who are in the room. (*The VLE*) (i)

When we did give examples, she would nod her head. She was good at building good relationships with everyone, making eye contact, making sure that everyone was involved in it. (ii)

She picked up on it, as I must have had a blank expression on my face. (iii)

As you joined in and, there was just that smile. (iv)

She understood; she knew we were struggling. (v)

As demonstrated above, all the participants knew about the tutor's ability to communicate non-verbally. Their responses indicate that the tutor was empathetic towards them as they settled into a new way of education within the VLE. She used her ability to express emotions non-verbally accurately and empathise with them. In the interviews, the participants talked at great length about their *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) of the difficulties they encountered in the early sessions working synchronously in the VLE with the tutor:

It just felt more pressured with this one, with it being the major study. So, I wanted to do really well. (iii)

The participants shared that they were experiencing difficulties due to the direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. They said that they were finding the module based on completing their research hard to do as it was both academically challenging and because it was held within a VLE, which was a new method of instruction for them:

‘I was really panicking going into this, ‘cause this is what put me off doing a degree sooner and then... Yeah, she just simplified it, made it easier. I felt so relieved after a few sessions, and (*she*) put my mind at ease, and she said, ‘You’ll get it, you’ll do it.’”

(iii)

The participant’s *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) was one of worry and unease. Being apprehensive about the VLE sessions at the start of the module, the tutor’s guidance, which potentially used her EI and her ability to feel empathetic towards the student, appeared to help to make the student feel she could achieve academic success. In this way, the student became enabled to change her *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) from being stressed about her studies and learning in a VLE to one of competence.

Kyriakides et al. (2013) outlined the varied factors that affect student academic outcomes in their meta-analysis of studies that explored effective face-to-face teaching and found that without the tutor’s practical guidance, a module’s learning goals could not be completed. Their findings were endorsed and expanded to include online teaching with this research, as the tutor’s guidance benefited Participant iii. The tutor utilised verbal and non-verbal communication, which could have been enhanced by her EI, to facilitate a PVCoP that cultivated a VLE that was a safe environment for the nervous students to participate in, similar to that described by Gunasekara et al. (2022). Their study reported that in online learning situations, students appreciated ‘small gestures of support’ (p 123), such as taking time to greet them at the beginning of the session and being aware of the students’ emotional needs to foster inclusive online learning environments. The students in this study also described how vital the routines of being welcomed to the session and being aware of the empathetic gaze of the tutor were to them and how they fostered a learning environment in which they thrived academically. As a result, this enabled the students to alter their *Da-sein*

(Heidegger et al., 2010) from one of worry to one where their self-belief was one of achievement and academic success. This finding is similar to the participants in Elsayed's (2021) study, which enabled the development of the student participants' self-confidence to increase their self-efficacy.

This phenomenological research study echoes the work of Dolev and Leshem (2017), who indicated that motivated teachers might effectively employ their EI to encourage their students to achieve academically and suggests that the same motivational strategies may apply to tutors in VLEs. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research as the emotionally intelligent tutor in this study appeared to facilitate a PVCoP (Wenger, 1999) within the VLE built on non-verbal empathetic communication in which the *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) of the students changed from one of apprehension to one where they became academically successful.

#### **6.4. The Significance of the Findings**

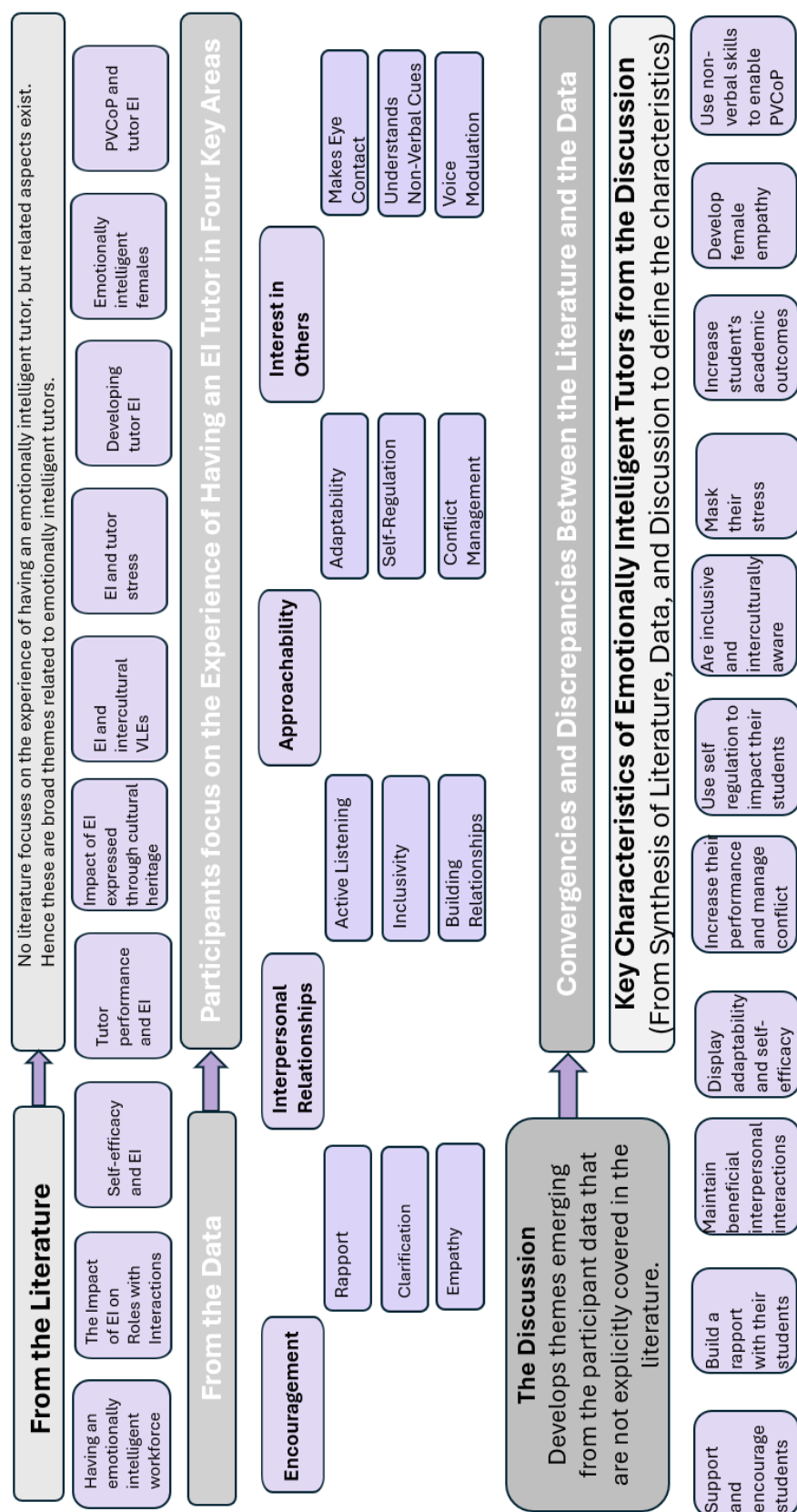
Previous studies have found significant areas of EI research, such as training to increase tutor EI levels (Khassawneh et al., 2022) or the impact of maturity (Kaur et al., 2019) or of being femininely self-gendered (Martínez-Marín et al., 2021) on EI levels, which the participants did not discuss; as those prior research studies were focussed on the first-person impact of being emotionally intelligent. The literature review revealed them to be interesting areas of academic discussion that could be explored and aligned with future studies. However, in this study, the participants focused on the third-person perceptions of their interactions with their emotionally intelligent tutor.

All the discussion areas included in this study can be viewed in Figure 7 below. The figure shows the findings from the literature and details the abilities an emotionally intelligent tutor could have and the impact that being emotionally intelligent may have on the



tutor and their skillset. The findings are then linked to the data analysis, which shows the participants' focus on the experiences of having an EI tutor. The placement of each literature theme relative to the data analysis and findings is also included to show their alignment. This discussion of the context locates this research in the previous understanding of the impact of being emotionally intelligent. It demonstrates its ability to make pertinent links between the prior research and this study's findings based on the interaction of the emotionally intelligent tutor and her students' perceptions of her influence on them.

Figure 6: A Chart to Show the Relationship Between the Data, the Literature, and the Discussion

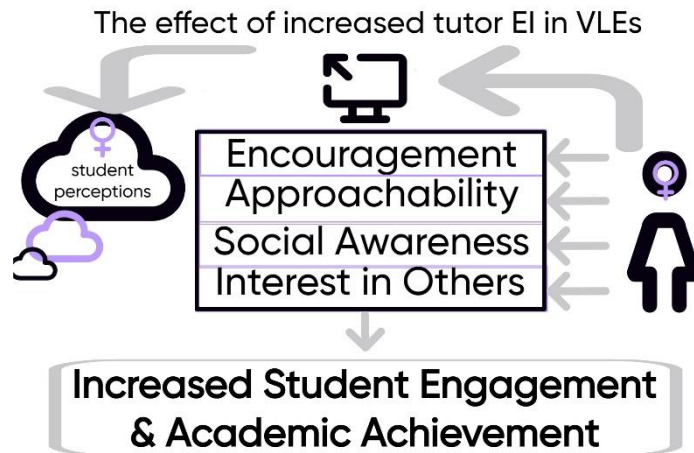


A Chart to Show the Relationship Between the Literature, the Data and the Discussion

This study is significant as for over thirty years, there has been much previous research focusing on the investigation into and of aspects of emotional intelligence (Bru-Luna et al., 2021; Gill et al., 2015; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Mayer et al., 2012) and highlighted the attributes desirable for an emotionally intelligent tutor (Arghode et al., 2022; Kaur et al., 2019; Khassawneh et al., 2022; Sha et al., 2022; Youde, 2020). Nevertheless, there is a paucity of phenomenological research into students' perceptions of a tutor's EI. Scant research has investigated students' experiences with an emotionally intelligent tutor or the impact of the tutor's EI in a VLE. Indeed, VLEs are an underexplored context deserving of further investigation, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic forced a global shift to online learning (Chen et al., 2020). Furthermore, recommendations have been made for investigating student experiences of the tutor's EI (Arghode et al., 2022; Awwad, 2022; Youde, 2020). Therefore, this phenomenological research contributes to understanding a small sample of female student experiences and perceptions of their female tutor's EI within a VLE by illuminating the individual's *Da-sein* (what does it mean to be in the student's world?) (Heidegger et al., 2010).

The discussion has presented the findings from this study relative to the literature review in detail. The findings were consistent with previous research that indicated that emotionally intelligent tutors could engage in certain behaviours that students would find beneficial. However, the participants in this small phenomenological research study added their contextual views of being female and tutored by a female instructor in a VLE to the prior findings. Not only did the tutor engage in practices previously found by prior empirical research to use EI, but the students experienced these practices, perceived them, and placed importance on them whilst studying in a VLE, as shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 7: A Summary of the Participants' Perceptions of the Effect of the Tutor's EI in the VLE



The review of EI by Arghode et al. (2022) indicated that an EI tutor would be able to build and maintain a rapport with their students despite the limitations of educating in a VLE. All the participants described the warmth of their relationship with the tutor, focussing on how they felt about being individually known by the tutor despite the limitations of the VLE and the remote engagement. Previous research has suggested that emotionally intelligent tutors may utilise their EI and perhaps be able to support and encourage their students in face-to-face classrooms (Kaur et al., 2019). This research study has added to Kaur et al.'s (2019) work and enabled a nuanced phenomenological understanding of the experiences of female students taught in VLEs. The participants all noticed the tutor's support and encouragement, and their *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) grew in confidence because of the tutor's encouraging practices. The tutor encouraged even the most reticent of her participants to ensure their academic success despite their perceived difficulties in studying in a VLE. This finding highlights the impact the emotionally intelligent tutor had on the participants and suggests that all tutors should aim to be similarly encouraging and engage their emotional intelligence. This finding is significant for tutors who should be aware that VLE students notice and appreciate EI tutor behaviours and practices, particularly those concerned with building a rapport between tutors and their students.

It has long been established that tutoring requires social interactions to form the foundation between the tutor and the student (Giles, 2018) and that these interactions are facilitated by positive mutual regard (Rogers, 1957), which, in turn, may be strengthened by the tutor's EI. It follows that, ultimately, the tutor's EI positively impacts the tutor-student relationship (Dallman, 2022). Neither Giles' (2018) nor Dallman's (2022) findings focused on VLE practices of female emotionally intelligent tutors and their students. In this study, the participants all mentioned the warmth and friendliness of the tutor, who, it seems, was more careful not to distance herself further from the students due to the barriers created by the synchronous VLE sessions. This is relevant for VLE tutors, who should be cognisant of building tutor-student relationships in the VLE that are as warm and friendly, if not more so, than when they are in face-to-face settings.

Tutor performance in face-to-face classrooms and its subsequent impact on student learning have already been explored (Bibi et al., 2022), along with the effect of tutor EI on performance by Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017) and the ability of emotionally intelligent teachers to have a positive impact on student achievement (Alam & Ahmad, 2018). Synchronous VLE lessons can also be a positive student experience (Chen et al., 2020), which may facilitate the transfer of ideas and knowledge due to the ability to provide real-time feedback and the construction of meaningful tutor-student and student-student relationships within the cohort. This research study found that these relationships resulted in close virtual group bonds being built, similar to those described by Kilpatrick (2019). They were described in this thesis as Potential Virtual Communities of Practice (PVCoP) (Wenger, 1999). VCoP are informal groupings that may emerge when like-minded parties engage in joint endeavours and work towards a common goal online. The participants experienced being in a team or a PVCoP which had emerged because of the unexpected nature of their studies in the VLE as they learnt how to be online students and navigated learning together.

In this research study, the emotionally intelligent tutor demonstrated that she understood that not all participants were active members of the PVCoP and enabled one participant to join. Participant ii became a member after the tutor's direct intervention. The participant's *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010) was one in which she did not understand how to be a student within a VLE, and her tutor's guidance was instrumental in enabling her to do so. The students were required to learn how to engage in their studies in a VLE, and to do so, they became a team (as described by Participant ii). The teams were unique and particular to each cohort of students; however, one participant described how she felt excluded. The emotionally intelligent tutor observed this exclusion and reached out to the student, thus facilitating her becoming a team member. In this way, the tutor helped her become a more engaged and participatory VLE student; she revealed that she flourished academically because she shared her ideas and improved her cognition of the subject matter. The tutor demonstrated that she understood the students' feelings of isolation. The tutor's EI could have facilitated her empathy towards the student and her intervention; it was clear that the student felt grateful to the tutor for her empathy.

One of the ways the tutor helped build and maintain the PVCoP included her use of non-verbal communication, which transcended the difficulties of tutoring in a VLE. The participants experienced a *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) of a VLE that encouraged cohesion facilitated by the tutor's EI and her use of her tone of voice, for example, to convey her feelings when necessary. VLE tutors should be vigilant and aware of the student teams and PVCoP that may be formed in their VLE sessions and be able to facilitate all students' participation. Tutor EI may be the key to enabling this to take place. Wenger's (1999) theory of CoP was useful to this thesis in understanding how the role of the tutor enabled the student to access and then actively participate in the cohort's way of being in the VLE and to know

how the team may develop further into a PVCoP and be an enabling factor for the students to understand the different ways of being a student online.

Zee and Koomen (2016) established that emotionally intelligent tutors have a greater capacity for self-efficacy, and their findings were added to by Alam and Ahmad (2018), who found that the tutor's EI and self-efficacy are positively linked to student outcomes. The participants all had academically successful results while studying with the tutor. Despite the module being more demanding than they had previously encountered and studying for the first time in a VLE, the participants generally indicated that the tutor's EI was integral to their academic achievements.

Previous research has linked emotionally intelligent tutors to being able to understand their students' needs (Majeski et al., 2017) and that EI modifies tutor attitudes and performance (Kaur et al., 2018) to enable harmonious classroom environments. It was noticeable in this research that the participants generally did not mention conflict despite being involved in thirty-six timetabled sessions, plus individual feedback sessions and other tutorials as required. When a conflict was mentioned, it was dealt with speedily, and the disruption to learning was only minor, which is a further vindication of tutor Kaur et al.'s (2018) findings that emotionally intelligent tutors can also maintain harmonious online working environments.

The participants experienced the tutor's ability to self-regulate her emotional responses when the world was still adjusting to the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. Khassawneh et al. (2022) further established the link between EI and response self-regulation building on the self-regulation theories of Mayer et al. (2016), and Răducu and Stănculescu (2021) found that interactive VLE sessions similar to those experienced by the participants enable learning to take place. The participants' *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) was one in which

their confidence in their abilities was built by their interactions with their self-regulating tutor. The review by Arghode et al. (2022) has demonstrated that tutors should use their EI to be aware of cultural differences between their students and modify their responses accordingly. This research reinforces their view as the tutor appeared to use her EI to enable her to understand the culturally different emotional responses displayed by her international students and ensured the VLE was inclusive and welcoming to them all. The international students spoke as enthusiastically about the tutor's warmth and inclusion in the VLE as the home students, which indicates the intercultural understanding of the tutor and demonstrates her ability to be inclusive to everyone.

### **6.5. Summary of the Discussion**

This discussion of the findings has shown how this study has contributed to the field of knowledge of tutor EI and does so from the context of online education and the nuanced understanding of the students' perspectives. The SPA enabled the participants' voices to be illuminated and contrasted with the relevant literature to enhance this study's contributions to understanding the impact of emotionally intelligent online tutors. Four superordinate themes comprising twelve subordinate themes were presented as tutor desirable attributes to enhance teaching and learning as aspects of sound pedagogical practice, and these were discussed concerning the research's aims. The research found that emotionally intelligent tutors encourage and support their online students by building relationships with them. VLE students were found to form potential communities of practice to help them navigate becoming online students, and the tutor enabled this practice. The online tutor used her self-efficacy, adaptability, and emotional regulation to have a favourable effect on the VLE and created a harmonious learning environment that was inclusive and enabling for all the students regardless of their culture. The Empathetic tutor could mask her stress to enable the



students to feel at ease and encourage learning, resulting in good academic outcomes. Having resumed the findings from the discussion, the study moves to the concluding chapter, Chapter Seven, which includes the implications of this study, recommendations, and a conclusion.

## **7. Chapter Seven: Recommendations and Conclusion**

### **7.1. Introduction**

This final Chapter Seven of the thesis links all the relevant findings and implications together to present them as a cohesive summary of the research focussed on exploring student experiences of online instruction with an emotionally intelligent tutor. This chapter commences with an overview of the research study before moving on to a resume of the novel synergistic phenomenological approach. A reminder of the accidental female gaze follows this before articulating this thesis's contributions to knowledge. Implications for tutors and higher educational institutions (HEIs) are discussed before the conclusion of the thesis. The chapter closes with study limitations and a final reflection.

### **7.2. Overview of the Research Study**

Chapter One considered the importance of emotionally intelligent tutors and addressed this research study's purpose before identifying the problem statement and introducing the synergistic phenomenological approach (SPA) used as a theoretical holistic framework to guide the study and answer the research questions. The significance and relevance of the study to educators from any level were discussed, as well as the implications for tutors and institutions.

An open attitude was adopted before the literature review presented in Chapters Two and Five. The literature review was wide-ranging and amenable to any valuable topic of discussion. All potential avenues were pursued by gathering appropriate sources unbiasedly so that the focus was not on looking for evidence to reinforce the claims made by the data. The first section (Chapter Two) considered a historical timeline of emotional intelligence (EI) from the first designation up to the present. Ability EI was discussed and highlighted as the

approach to EI that would be used as it incorporated skills identified as pertinent to tutors. The discussion also considered the diverse ways to measure EI and introduced the tool chosen to measure the tutor's EI used in this research.

Chapter Three was devoted to the theoretical underpinnings of the SPA and the methodology adopted by this study. It carefully explained the study's conduct and its underlying aspects, aligning it with a phenomenological aspiration to understand the lived experiences of the female participants. It discussed the sample, data collection method, and analysis and described the steps taken to ensure the study's validity and to maintain an ethical stance throughout the research.

Chapter Four presented the results of the interviews and described the data to consider the phenomenon's *Essence* (Husserl, 2012a) as experienced by the participants and understood and interpreted by the researcher. The careful *Epoché* (Husserl, 2013a) by the researcher before the data analysis ensured that the participants' views remained the focus of the study.

It is important to note that the participants were focused on their *Da-sein* (ways of being in their world) (Heidegger et al., 2010) during the interviews, with the result that the data produced was radically different from that in the literature review. The participants considered the impact of the emotionally intelligent tutor and their tutor's behaviours on themselves using a third-person perspective. They had no foreknowledge of the literature review's structure and were not influenced by the researcher to consider the tutor's EI in any way other than how they chose to. In contrast, the second part of the literature review (Chapter Five) focused on the first-person impact of being emotionally intelligent on tutors themselves, their behaviours, and their ways of being a tutor. No available literature considered students' views of tutor EI, which demonstrates the incongruence of the literature

with the data findings. The findings reiterate the unique contribution of this research study and its third-person as opposed to first-person perspective.

Chapter Five, the second part of the literature review, considered the importance of emotionally intelligent tutors and made links to their impact in a synchronous virtual learning environment (VLE). It discussed the significant literature relating to the abilities that emotionally intelligent tutors may possess and the potential areas of impact on students; this position was adopted due to the scarcity of literature on students' views and was the closest worthwhile alignment to prior research. It identified studies suggesting that EI would be a positive adjunct in a tutor's arsenal of skills; nonetheless, these were primarily associated with traditional face-to-face tutoring and speculated that the same attributes would be as desirable in a VLE tutor. The literature review was done after the data collection (Chapter Three) and description and presentation (Chapter Four) to maintain the *Phenomenological Reduction* (Husserl, 1970) of the researcher and allow the *Essence* of the phenomenon as described by the participants to be defined (Husserl, 1970, 2012a). The prior research indicated the effect of EI on numerous factors that contribute to a tutor's skill set from a first-person point of view and impact their students the most. The literature indicated that their EI increases as a tutor gains maturity, particularly for tutors who acknowledge the feminine aspect of their nature. EI has also been found to positively impact tutor self-efficacy, performance in coping with stress and the myriad interpersonal interactions between tutors and their students. Research has also found that tutor EI enables their emotional regulation and expression and helps them co-construct potential virtual communities of practice (PVCoP) with their students. However, the review of the prior research demonstrated a lack of understanding of the experiences of female students who have been tutored in VLEs by emotionally intelligent tutors from a third-person perspective and the impact that such tutors may have on them including their ability to co-construct PVCoP.

Chapter Six discussed and contrasted the data presentation and literature review findings. It revealed the gaps in knowledge that this study has been able to address and advance. It showed the wide-ranging prior research into EI and highlighted the previous lack of students' perceptions and, therefore, the personal impact of the tutors' EI on online students and their academic achievements. It examined how students conceptualise tutor EI and gave their conceptualisations a voice. The students in this study could recognise and value the tutor's EI due to the positive impact this had on themselves, their learning and subsequent academic achievements.

Having summarised the previous chapters, the following section resumes the context of the research study.

### **7.3. The Context of the Research**

It was not conceived that this study would have a feminist stance, and the researcher was not motivated to conduct feminist phenomenological research. Notwithstanding, this research incorporated female actors. The literature review also revealed a lack of current research investigating online female tutors' EI reinforcing the pertinence of the accidentally female study. This research study utilised an emotionally intelligent tutor whose role was a gatekeeper (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016) to grant access to the students she had taught in a VLE. Semi-structured interviews incorporating interview techniques to create a collaborative co-understanding (Oakley, 2015) were used to generate the complex and detailed data (see 3.17 and 3.17.1) incorporating *Da-sein* (Heidegger et al., 2010), which was employed to co-create understanding between the participants and the researcher through the sharing of knowledge (Skeggs, 2008).

The co-created knowledge was used to answer the research questions, these are revisited in the next section which includes the key insights from the findings.

#### **7.4. Summary of the Research Question Findings**

The research questions that this SPA research used as a lens to understand the participants' experiences were:

- How do students recognise and experience the tutor's emotional intelligence in synchronous online learning contexts?
- How do students recognise and value the tutor's emotional intelligence levels in synchronous online learning contexts?

The Data Presentation and Description Chapter Four and the Interpretation and Discussion Chapter Six revealed that students recognise, experience and value their online tutor's EI in numerous ways. Chapters Four and Six offer compelling insights into the significance of online tutors' EI in students' learning experiences. Chapter Four, through the participants' own words, unveils how students identified their tutor's EI, describing her as encouraging and approachable. Beyond recognition, the chapter illustrates how students experienced their tutor's EI, highlighting her ability to build meaningful relationships and foster genuine connections. Chapter Six builds on this by interpreting the data to emphasise the profound impact of the tutor's EI. The students valued her EI highly, noting that it enhanced their engagement with the module and ultimately contributed to their academic success. These findings decisively address the research questions, shedding light on an emotionally intelligent tutor's crucial role in shaping positive online learning experiences.

#### **7.5. This Thesis' Original Contributions to Expanding Knowledge**

This thesis is founded on its two original contributions to knowledge, one empirical and one phenomenological methodological.

The empirical contribution increases understanding of online student experiences of their emotionally intelligent tutor by adding further knowledge about how a third person perceives and encounters another's EI. Thus, the findings come from the student participants' third-person perspective and are based on their ways of experiencing and receiving the tutor's EI and contemplate how students perceive and conceptualise emotionally intelligent online tutoring. The findings highlight what the student recipients considered to be the benefits of online interactions with an emotionally intelligent tutor. This research has shown that this is an important contribution to knowledge because it has identified attributes that students believe are features of good online tutoring and tutoring pedagogical practices that could be significant and transferable to other online educational or training contexts.

The findings contrast with the literature and prior research, which had conceptualised EI in terms of those with degrees of being emotionally intelligent and how this affects the tutor directly from a first-person perspective. No readily available research could be found considering how an individual's EI affects others, how others experience that EI, or how an individual's (in this study, the tutor) EI is experienced by others (in this study, the student participants). Thus, there is a synergy between what being an emotionally intelligent tutor as an individual feels like (as discovered in the literature) and receiving or experiencing the expression of that EI as a student (as found out in the data). The dichotomy between the data set and the literature review revealed the nature of this study's unique knowledge contribution. Within that framework of a third-person perspective, the participants conceptualised the importance of online tutors being emotionally intelligent and described four areas of significance: tutor encouragement, interpersonal relationships between the tutor and the student, approachability of the tutor and the tutor having an interest in their students.

Reconciling the two perspectives was tricky as the data appeared disparate from the literature. However, the synergistic phenomenological lens that was used allowed the coalescence of the data and literature to take place, placing importance on both and highlighting the need for future EI studies to refocus their attention on the third-person perspective to enable a more nuanced understanding of the full impact of being emotionally intelligent and its influence on others. Researching and analysing data from the third-person perspective required the researcher to be sure that the participants focussed on their experiences of the tutor's EI and that her descriptions and understanding reflected their views accurately. To ensure their voices were accurately interpreted the researcher included member checking from the participants to ensure they were represented appropriately. The researcher also regularly documented decisions made in her journal entries; this helped maintain a paper trail of the decisions made and became a valuable resource to use when writing up the study.

The second contribution to knowledge concerns this research study's unique phenomenological methodological stance, synthesising the two branches of phenomenology. All too frequently, there has been a deliberate ontological separation of phenomenology into transcendental descriptive (Husserl, 2012a) or hermeneutic interpretive (Heidegger, 1996) phenomenological approaches. The deliberate delineation has been habitually done following Heidegger's break from Husserlian traditions in his attempt to create a new phenomenological understanding.

However, phenomenology focuses on a return "to the things themselves" (Husserl, 2013b, p.168), and the phenomenological researcher must consider the phenomenon as it reveals itself to be (Heidegger, 1996; Heidegger et al., 2010). This thesis purposefully employed blended elements (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022) to integrate transcendental



(Husserl, 2012a) and hermeneutic (Heidegger, 1996) phenomenological approaches in fusion (Aguas, 2022) (see Appendix M). Choosing to harmonise the methodology in a synergistic phenomenological approach strengthened the research paradigm and clarified the experiences of female students experiencing the phenomenon of having an emotionally intelligent tutor in a VLE. The results revealed that the differences in the transcendental and hermeneutic approaches, which both have their epistemological and ontological foundations in phenomenology, enabled rigorous and reflective research to be conducted, including the synthesis of approaches to allow the phenomenon to be more fully understood.

By choosing to harmonise the two branches of phenomenology, this research has contributed to a third way of conducting phenomenological research that other studies may use. It could be employed by researchers who are similar to their participants and have shared experiences (for example, the female researcher was a student at the same university in this study and had studied online during the COVID-19 pandemic) and who are researching an area also new to them (the researcher had only a vague notion of EI at the inception of the study). It is a valuable method to understand and illuminate participants' lived experiences and allows a notion of transferability whilst acknowledging the unique voices of the participants.

Future studies using a SPA may incorporate the two founding stances of phenomenology differently from the route adopted by the researcher in this study due to the flexibility of the approach. Taking a synthesised stance maintained the study's congruence with the SPA and ensured decisions about the subsequent structure and presentation of the thesis perpetuated that congruence. The steps taken to ensure the study maintained its synthesis were discussed with the supervisory team and explored in reflective journal entries

as the researcher sought a path acknowledging the different phenomenological stances (see Appendix S).

The Husserlian aspect of the SPA required the researcher to maintain a distance from the literature pertinent to the data until after the data analysis, resulting in extra time that needed to be allowed at the end of the study to perform a thorough review. Time was also required to elapse between the analysis and literature review so that the researcher was not merely looking for evidence to corroborate the data. When performing the literature review, the researcher needed to be prepared to use a comprehensive brushstroke and be open to any helpful literature associated with the topic. The Heideggerian interpretational aspect of the SPA maintained the openness to all the available literature to ensure results had transferability whilst acknowledging their uniqueness.

Future SPA researchers may need to be receptive for the participants (as in this study) to discuss things that the literature review does not illuminate (for example, the particular abilities of the tutor, such as her encouragement of the students, her approachability and her interest in their welfare) and this can lead to difficulties reconciling interesting literature with the participant's views and vice versa. Similarly, the literature talked about increasing tutor EI levels or the impact of gender on EI, which the participants did not discuss. However, the advantage of maintaining the participants' voices to ensure the phenomenon's *Essence* is uncovered without diluting the findings by accessing the literature before the analysis created a study rich in the participants' unique voices, thus deepening the understanding of their lived experiences. Drawing on the researcher's prior knowledge of being a student to enable an accurate interpretation of the data enabled a Heideggerian view of phenomenology to add a further layer of understanding and transferability to the findings, which enhanced the nuanced discussion in Chapter Five. Nonetheless, care had to be taken via the researcher's reflective

journalling to ensure the participants' voices were heard and to maintain the researcher's distance from the data to ensure its integrity (see Appendix R).

The synergistic phenomenological route of the qualitative methodology, with its clear delineation away from engagement with the literature, coupled with the researcher keeping her personal views *Bracketed* from the study write-up and then stepping closer to the literature before the data discussion, has created a study rich in contextual data. The researcher is confident that visiting the literature before the interviews took place would have impacted her and the line of questioning, which would, in turn, have altered the data and may not have highlighted the disparity between the first and third-person views of EI that this research study encountered nor enabled the illumination of this discrepancy via a qualitative discourse about female views.

The findings of this research study have revealed implications for tutors and their practice in VLEs. It has also raised points that HEI employers may wish to consider. These implications are highlighted in the following sections, and recommendations have also been included to further the impact of this thesis.

## **7.6. Implications and Recommendations for Tutors**

The findings from this research study indicate that the advantages of having or being an emotionally intelligent tutor are manifold for both the students and the tutor within a VLE. This research has demonstrated that female students of all ages and differing nationalities know and recognise the tutor's EI and value emotionally intelligent attributes when their tutor displays them. EI has been found to develop alongside tutor maturity (Berenson et al., 2008; Chen et al., 2016; Kaur et al., 2019), particularly for females (Cabello et al., 2016). It should be noted that the tutor in this research study was measured as having a competent EI using the MSCEIT (Salovey et al., 2003), was mature, and identified as female and possibly,

consequently, her EI was greater during this study than it had been when it was assessed due to the impact of the factors of femininity and age on her EI. Nevertheless, EI is an ability that may be learned and improved (Berenson et al., 2008) by any tutor willing to do so, regardless of age. Previous recommendations have been made for tutors, particularly early career tutors, to receive EI instruction (Khassawneh et al., 2022) as improving their EI abilities strengthens their teacher-student relationships due to EI's mediating effect and increases the level of their student's academic success (Abou Assali & Riskus, 2023) and could initiate a career improved by the ability to be emotionally intelligent. A significant consideration for tutors in encouraging them to participate in EI training schemes could be the impact of increased EI on themselves and emotionally intelligent practices that enhance their abilities to enable the shared endeavour of working within the VLE to be productive for all.

All tutors should be encouraged to explore and develop their personalities' empathetic and nurturing aspects to enable their emotional intelligence to develop fully (Martínez-Marín et al., 2021). Becoming more empathetic may increase the potential of the tutor's emotional intelligence's moderating influence and their ability to employ this for their and their students' benefit. Emotionally intelligent tutors have been found to experience less stress (Brackett & Katulak, 2013) and burnout and to have higher job satisfaction (Zee & Koomen, 2016), which are all desirable attributes for any professional educator. Emotionally intelligent tutors have been found to have greater levels of self-efficacy (Alam & Ahmad, 2018; Kaur et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2019) and higher performance levels (Bibi et al., 2022). Tutors should also be made aware that being more emotionally intelligent enables their inclusivity and intercultural awareness (Arghode et al., 2022); it allows them to understand the outward emotions that the students display and helps tutors with their self-management of emotions (Khassawneh et al., 2022). In this way, the tutor can maintain a virtual environment that is welcoming towards all their students and empathetic towards their emotional displays; this

study recommends that tutors be encouraged to engage with reflective practices to enable their EI abilities to increase. The following section expands on the tutor recommendations and considers the implications of this study for HEI's.

### **7.7. Implications and Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions and Tutor Training**

Tutor EI has been found to have a positive impact on students and their academic achievement (Wu et al., 2019), engagement (Arghode et al., 2022), and motivation (Răducu & Stănculescu, 2021) both in the face-to-face classroom and in asynchronous online learning situations (Ali et al., 2017; Youde, 2020). As a result of the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions routinely offer VLE instruction (Quezada et al., 2020; UCAS, 2024), and there are many indicators that online instruction is here to stay and may indeed become the new normal (Garivaldis et al., 2022). EI training may be worthwhile for all tutors at any career stage, but even more so if they are frequently called upon to work in VLEs. Similarly, it would seem advantageous to provide instruction to tutors focusing on developing the emotionally intelligent skillset that the VLE demands (Majeski et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2021). Better tutor-student relationships and eventual student academic achievement in the VLE would offset the initial costs of implementing such training (Mortiboys, 2012). Thus, greater tutor self-efficacy (Vesely et al., 2014), effective teaching (Khassawneh et al., 2022) and increased student satisfaction and academic achievement should be ample motivation to invest in tutors' EI.

Repeated calls have been made for tutors to receive instructional EI training at an early stage in their preservice or newly qualified careers (Arghode et al., 2022; Gilar-Corbi et al., 2019; Latif et al., 2017) to develop or increase their EI, and for this to be revisited throughout their careers in a reflective and considered manner (Ferdosipour & Salimi, 2023).

Higher educational institutions may choose to formally evaluate their tutor workforce to establish everyone's EI levels and enable them to understand the aspects of EI that they may need to focus on to improve. In the same way, such assessments may be conducted as part of teacher training programmes to enable newly qualified teachers to be cognisant of their own EI strengths and areas for development. As the calls have been continually repeated, it is apparent that they have generally been ignored. However, Greek trainee teachers have EI development included in their curriculum, which has been shown to affect their emotion identification and regulation (Kyriazopoulou & Pappa, 2023). Globally, more institutions should now consider offering support and training for online tutors, in particular, to enhance their abilities to improve tutor-student interactions, mitigate the adverse effects of remote instruction and increase student well-being, engagement and ultimately, their academic achievement (Enwereji et al., 2023).

Clearly, online students should receive the same high-quality instruction as face-to-face students (Quezada et al., 2020). Institutions may have employed high-calibre tutors with proven histories of success in face-to-face instruction. The assumption that the same success may be easily achieved in a VLE without any interventional training could be considered short-sighted. It is a matter of equipping tutors with a skill set to overcome the difficulties that remote instruction presents, which will improve tutor and student success. Students may anticipate that institutions and VLE tutors will ensure that teaching and learning in VLEs are on par with face-to-face instruction. Improving the VLE tutor's EI abilities may positively impact their tutor-student interactions, helping to build a rapport with each student and increasing student performance (Sanchez, 2016).

This study found that the students recognised and conceptualised the tutor's EI and found it positively impacted their academic achievements. It must be noted that although

students recognise the value of emotionally intelligent tutors, they are not routinely offered the choice of selecting one. The selection of the emotionally intelligent tutor and the training to facilitate the EI of the workforce remains with the HE institution in the first instance and with the tutors to engage with specific training to improve or build their EI skills. At the same time, institutions should actively engage with the concept of EI, promoting it as a desirable attribute amongst their workforces. Reflexive training practices to improve the tutor's EI levels could enable tutors to be more mindful of emotionally intelligent practices and incorporate them into their pedagogy. HE institutions may find it helpful to support tutor EI training with support sessions or include it in their continual professional development programmes for their staff. This study has made pertinent recommendations for HEIs, and the next section makes concluding remarks about the study.

## **7.8. Conclusion**

Emotional intelligence is a complex psychological concept that can impact the self and others. It has been argued and critiqued for many years and may continue to cause rancour for some time. This small-scale phenomenological research study has contributed to the knowledge and understanding of and illuminated aspects of students' perceptions of the tutor's emotional intelligence. It incorporates a female viewpoint as this study considered the phenomenality of being a student of an emotionally intelligent tutor and has increased the awareness of the experiences of female students in a VLE.

The far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of direct access to most global HE institutions and courses (Hamill, 2020; Rashid & Yadav, 2020). The findings from Toprak and Tunc (2022) indicated that the resultant emotional and physical health issues could affect the COVID-19 generation of students for the foreseeable future as a consequence of the negative impacts of increased anxiety and stress caused by the

uncertainties of studying at that time and the general context of the climate of unpredictability which continues post-pandemic (Fridkin et al., 2023). One direct result of the pandemic was the transformational move to online instruction and VLEs within all areas of education and teaching (Anthony Jnr & Noel, 2021; Jili et al., 2021). There is some evidence from research, such as that by Williams and Donlan (2023) and Garivaldis et al. (2022), that aspects of online instruction have been incorporated into HE institutions' strategies for long-term lesson delivery and that the future of HE instruction may well be in a more digital, online format. Many institutions now offer various online courses (UCAS, 2024). The sudden move to online instruction was found by prior research to be readily accepted by 'tech-savvy' digitally aware students (Limniou et al., 2021), and the younger participants in this study reinforced that expectation. However, the older and more mature students were less likely to 'enjoy' online instruction. They approached the prospect of engaging with the process reluctantly. It appeared to be yet another new thing at a time when the world was facing unparalleled levels of uncertainty. The older participants all talked about their anxiety at having to begin VLE sessions to complete their studies. The remoteness of the sessions and their worries about using the technology successfully were shared concerns. Although, they indicated that their tutor was instrumental in helping them to adjust and settle into the weekly sessions, and one participant found, to her surprise, that they would 'look forward to their sessions together' (iv).

Face-to-face learning has traditionally been thought to give better learning opportunities due to the potential for interactivity (Miliszewska, 2007). This study found that students described academic achievements in the VLE as being generally enhanced by the tutor's EI, as were their motivation and engagement with the course, possibly because of the synchronous learning that took place facilitated by the emotionally intelligent tutor. The tutor's EI was integral to supporting and encouraging the students to engage with working in



the VLE. Even the more initially reluctant to engage online students said they looked forward to their regular weekly sessions, mentioning that in a time of great upheaval, they appreciated the normality of the cycle of lectures facilitated by their outwardly calm tutor. The tutor adeptly used her EI to build a rapport with all the students. This increased the students' engagement and improved the tutor-student relationships. The students appreciated being known as individuals despite the remote delivery, and the tutor's apparent humanising of the students overcame the barriers to learning traditionally associated with remote learning in VLEs. This phenomenological small-scale research has revealed the link between the importance of emotionally intelligent online tutors from the five female students' perspectives in a VLE. It has highlighted the importance of the tutor's EI for building and maintaining tutor-student relationships built on trust, empathy, and encouragement. It has revealed that students identify and value the tutor's EI abilities in synchronous VLEs, and one of the benefits of tutor EI is better academic achievement because of student engagement and cognisance.

The emotionally intelligent tutor in this research study employed a range of abilities to ameliorate the difficulties of delivering teaching and learning in the VLE. HEIs may consider providing younger tutors with training to improve their EI levels (Kaur et al., 2019), as EI is both known to increase as a result of specific interventions (Côté, 2014; Mayer & Salovey, 1997) and maturity (Chen et al., 2016). In this small-scale research, students recognised, understood, and benefited from a highly emotionally intelligent tutor's impact on the VLE, themselves, their attitude to learning, and their subsequent academic outcomes without necessarily knowing that the tutor's abilities were emotionally intelligence-based.

Having defined the study's conclusions, the following section outlines the limitations and makes suggestions that future studies may use to overcome them.

## 7.9. Study Limitations

An inevitable consequence of research is that there will be study limitations. This study's small sample size does not allow the findings to be transferable to every female student studying synchronously in a VLE with an emotionally intelligent female tutor; however, the students' views corroborated each other and reinforced the little relevant available literature.

The tutor discussed in this study had her EI assessed by the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2003), which has been pointed out to be a frequently used tool incorporating ability measures. Nevertheless, there are other conceptions of EI (trait and mixed, see 2.1 and 2.4), and it is possible that different findings could have emerged if an alternative measure of EI had been implemented. Future investigations may focus on an alternative measurement tool to corroborate the conclusions of this research study. The group of participants was small due to the in-depth phenomenological stance of the research; further investigations involving more participants would be beneficial to make the data more transferable.

At the same time, the study had a female bias; the sample recruitment was representative of the more considerable proportion of females enrolled in the university's educator training courses. Thus, the results may not be generalisable to male tutors or resonate with male students. Previous research indicated that feminine self-concept-gendered participants have higher scores in dimensions of EI than male self-concept-gendered ones (Martínez-Marín et al., 2021). Research involving male self-concept-gendered participants, either tutor and or student, could reveal interesting corroborations between this and other research and may increase the transferability of the results and open further interesting aspects of EI to study.

### 7.10. Concluding Reflection

This first use of an interpretive synergistic phenomenological approach to consider the students' views of their emotionally intelligent tutor is a unique contribution to knowledge (Dibley et al., 2020). The thesis' individual contributions to knowledge are a greater and more nuanced understanding of the impact on their students that a tutor's EI has within the context of online learning, a unique knowledge of a third-person view of EI and a new phenomenological methodology. It demonstrates how a qualitative methodology may be used to gain knowledge about a third-person perspective of another's EI whilst using a harmonised synthesis of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenological methods.

The findings of this small-scale research study provide evidence that emotionally intelligent online tutors can influence their students. This study has contributed to comprehending how female students perceive and conceptualise EI following their interactions with emotionally intelligent female online tutors. The students recognized that EI positively impacts online tutor practices. By exploring EI from their perspective, the study identified and understood the positive characteristics of EI in online learning as features of effective and sound online pedagogical practice. The study underscores the importance of an emotionally intelligent workforce within higher education institutions and suggests that EI abilities can be valuable for educators in any sector, particularly those working in a VLE. This research has enhanced the understanding of how students perceive their tutors' emotional intelligence in their online learning experiences. By identifying the key aspects highlighted by the participants, the study acknowledges the positive impact of emotional intelligence on online teaching practices. This research is significant as it unveils how students perceive their tutors' emotional intelligence and how it enriches their online learning experiences by pinpointing the features highlighted by the participants that can be further

developed pedagogically to enhance online learning and education. Understanding the impact of emotional intelligence from the students' perspective is crucial for fostering strong relationships between students and tutors in the VLE.

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## **Appendix**

- A-* Research support plan and approval to conduct research.
- B-* Email Contact Letter
- C-* Participant Information Sheet
- D-* Participant Consent Form
- E-* Email contact sent to the participants to inquire about what they understood about emotional intelligence before the interview process
- F-* Participant Emotional Intelligence Sheet
- G-* Participant Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire
- H-* Interview Schedule
- I-* Journal Extract: The Researcher's Early Thoughts about Emotional Intelligence
- J-* Journal Extract to Show the Researcher's Early Thoughts about Tutors' EI.
- K-* Journal Extract: The Researcher's Early Findings about Husserl
- L-* Journal Extract: The Researcher's Early Findings about Heidegger
- M-* Journal Extract: Husserl and Heidegger's Phenomenological Methodologies
- N-* Interview Extract with Participant ii Showing the Beginning of Coding using Colour to Differentiate Themes
- O-* Interview with Participant iii, Extracts were Chosen and Colour-coded to the Themes, and Early Interpretive Notes added
- P-* Extract Alignment Across Participants Showing Data from Participants i, ii, iii and iv
- Q-* Journal extract: Aligning Data Themes and Literature Findings
- R-* Figure 7: Demonstrates how the Themes from the Literature Review and the Findings were Incorporated into the Discussion Chapter
- S-* Journal Extract: Reflections on the Participant's Voices

**A: Research Support Plan**

Student Name	Aelly Armitage	
Student number	U1469203	
Research Degree	DCS5700	
School	School of Education & Professional Development	
Main Supervisor	Andrew Youde	
Date of enrolment	14/09/2020	
Mode of Attendance	<input type="checkbox"/> X <b>Full-time</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time	
Planned completion date	20/11/2024	
Is this proposal for practice-based research? (This can include an artefact, design, performance, composition etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <b>X</b> <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Title of the proposed research project	A Phenomenological Research Study into Student's Perceptions of the Online Tutor's Emotional Intelligence.	
<p>Please attach a research proposal.</p> <p>Your research proposal should include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Title of the project.</li> <li>➤ Aims of the project.</li> <li>➤ Background context of the research topic.</li> <li>➤ Review of existing research literature, demonstrating this project's original contribution.</li> <li>➤ Research questions or objectives.</li> <li>➤ Methodology and project design.</li> <li>➤ Project plan with a timeline, including progression milestones (e.g., Gantt chart); <input type="checkbox"/> List of references.</li> </ul>		

Please note:

- The average expectation for PhD students (full-time and part-time) is to complete an ethics form and gain approval from the relevant School Committee by Progression Point 1

1. Please refer to your school guidelines on completing ethics forms for approval.

- For MA/MSc by Research Degree students, the expectation is to complete an ethics form and gain approval from the relevant School Committee by month 3 (for full-time students) and by month 6 (for part-time students).

Please refer to your school guidelines on completing ethics forms for approval.

1. What ethical principles/codes of practice will guide your research?

### **Ethical Considerations**

The guidance of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024) and the University of Huddersfield's ethical protocols regarding generating, handling, and storing data will be observed.

2. Are any ethical issues likely to arise in this research, and how will you address them?

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher will take due care to ensure that any participant, student, or lecturer's identity may not be traced or linked. Participants will be asked to give informed consent to gather, store, interpret, and use the data. The researcher will observe current protocols for handling and storing such data and personal information; the data will be securely stored by being password-protected and encrypted. Only the researcher will have full access to the documents, voice recordings and transcripts. The tutors will be asked to give informed consent to access their previous MSCEIT scores and those of former students. The researcher will destroy all the generated data after completing the study per the General Data Protection Regulations (Information Commissioner's Office, 2018). It is not intended that the interviews will cause any harm to either the participants or the researcher.

Have any health and safety issues arisen or might arise, and how will you address them?

Health and safety issues have yet to arise, nor are there any anticipated. Should there be, some guidance will be sought from either the supervisor or the University of Huddersfield PGR School in the first instance.

Please describe any resources/facilities that will be required for you to complete your research (including whether these are readily available)

The interviews will be recorded using an Olympus DM770 with an Olympus ME34 compact zoom microphone. The recordings will be downloaded onto an HP Probook430 Lap Top Computer Via Olympus Sonority, stored in the cloud, and password protected. The transcriptions will also be generated on the same platform (Microsoft Teams), and these will also be stored in the cloud. The researcher owns all these devices.

- I wish to apply to my supervisory team for approval of my research programme based on the information given in this application.
- I confirm that the particulars shown are correct.
- I understand that, except with specific permission, I may not be a candidate for another award during my enrolment period.
- I understand that, except with explicit permission, I must prepare and defend my thesis in English.
- I agree to address any Skills Audit requirements necessary for consideration for progression.

PGR signature:	Aelly B Armitage	Date:	14/01/2021

Supervisor Approval

- I confirm approval of the research support plan
- I authorise the project is appropriate and viable

Main supervisor signature:	Andrew Youde	Date:	14/01/2021
<input type="checkbox"/>	PGR informed of the outcome, cc Main Supervisor and included a copy of the full report		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Update ASIS RDS 'Stage' with the outcome and RDS' Stage Comp' with the date.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Update School local records.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Upload a Copy of the report, and the outcome will be sent to the PGR to Wisdom.		

***B: Email Contact Letter Assisting with Research***

Hello!

My name is Aelly, and I am a second-year PhD student at the University of \*\*\*\*.

My research field is Emotional Intelligence. I am particularly keen to learn my fellow students' views of their tutor's Emotional Intelligence and how this may have impacted their studies. Your tutor \*\*\*\* with whom you studied \*\*\*\* has agreed to her students (i.e., you!) participating in my research.

You do not need to have any prior understanding of Emotional Intelligence to be able to take part. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to fill in a Likert Scale to help your understanding of Emotional Intelligence and attend a one-to-one semi-structured interview at a time convenient to you, either face to face or via Teams. We will discuss your view of your tutor's Emotional Intelligence and any positive or negative impact you feel this may have had on you.

Your tutor will not know if you have taken part and will not have access to copies of the interviews. All responses will be anonymised within the study. Should you decide not to participate, you will not be penalised in any way, but I hope you will consider helping me. You may find it helpful to have been a participant as part of your future research studies.

Many thanks for reading this; I would appreciate your indicating whether you will or will not be participating.

Best Wishes,

Aelly

*Aelly Armitage BA (Hons), Winner of the Vice Chancellor's Prize (2018), MA.*

*PhD Researcher (Education).*

*Marketing Advisor Huddersfield PGR Recovery and Resilience Conference 2022*

### ***C: Participant Information Sheet***

University of-\*\*\*\*

School of Education and Professional Development

Research Project Title: A Phenomenological Research Study into Student Perceptions of the Online Tutor's Emotional Intelligence

You are invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, you need to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if anything needs clarification or if you would like more information.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

What is the purpose of the project?

The research project is intended to provide the research focus for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis. It will discover if students recognise and how much they value their tutor's Emotional Intelligence in online learning contexts.

Why have I been chosen?

You fulfil the criteria for inclusion in this study. You are a student at the University of \*\*\*\*.

You have studied in an online learning environment for at least one module. Your tutor has had their Emotional Intelligence assessed and is happy for their students to participate.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary, so please do not feel obliged to participate. Refusal will involve no penalty whatsoever, and you may withdraw from the study at any stage without explaining it to the researcher.

What do I have to do?

You will be invited to participate in a background information survey to ensure you are clear about the aspects of emotional intelligence we will discuss; this will take the form of a Likert scale and then an interview. The interview will either be face-to-face or remote as circumstances permit. This should take no more than **one and a half hours** of your time.

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?

There should be no foreseeable disadvantages to your participation. You will already have the results from the module and tutor under discussion. Your tutor cannot access any comments you make, and any comments will not be ascribed to you in the write-up. If you are unhappy or have further questions at any stage in the process, please address your concerns to the researcher if this is appropriate. Alternatively, please contact the research supervisor, Dr Andrew Youde, School of Education & Professional Development, University of Huddersfield.

Will all my details be kept confidential?

All collected information will be strictly confidential and anonymised before the data is presented in the dissertation, in compliance with the Data Protection Act and ethical research guidelines and principles.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this research will be written in a thesis and presented for assessment in 2024. If you would like a copy, please contact the researcher.

Who has reviewed and approved the study, and who can be contacted?

The research supervisor is Dr Andrew Youde. They can be contacted at the University of \*\*\*\*.

Name & Contact Details of Researcher: Aelly Armitage: **Aelly.Armitage@hud.ac.uk**

***D: Participant Consent Form***

University of \*\*\*\*\*

School of Education and Professional Development

Participant Consent Form

**Title of Research Study:** A Phenomenological Research Study into Student Perceptions of the Online Tutor's Emotional Intelligence

Name of Researcher: Aelly Armitage

Participant Identifier Number:

☐

I confirm that I have read and understood the participant Information sheet related to this research and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

☐

I understand that all my responses will be anonymised.

☐

I give permission for the research team members to access my anonymised responses.

☐

I agree to take part in the above study.

**Name of Participant:** .....

Signature of Participant: .....

**Date:** .....

Name of Researcher: Aelly Armitage

Signature of Researcher:

Date:



***E: Email Contact Sent to the Participants to Enquire What They Understood About Emotional Intelligence Before the Interview Process***

University of \*\*\*\*

School of Education and Professional Development

Participant Background Information Sheet

Research Project Title: A Phenomenological Research Study into Student Perceptions of the Online Tutor's Emotional Intelligence

Hi

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in my research; it is much appreciated.

As you know, my study aims to consider your experiences of your tutor \*\*\*\*'s emotional intelligence.

Would you be so kind as to let me know what your understanding of emotional intelligence encompasses? We will discuss \*\*\*\*'s emotional intelligence and its impact on you. It would be helpful to understand what you think this means. Thank you.

(You may like to consider specific times when you were aware of \*\*\*\*'s emotional intelligence abilities and how they may have helped or hindered you online). If you are unsure you are describing emotional intelligence, please do not worry; we can discuss this topic together.

Many thanks, once again

Aelly Armitage, PhD Researcher

***F: Participant Emotional Intelligence Sheet***

University of \*\*\*\*

School of Education and Professional Development

Participant Background Information Sheet

Research Project Title: A Phenomenological Research Study into Student Perceptions of the Online Tutor's Emotional Intelligence

This study investigates your perceptions of your tutor, Dr \*\*\*\*'s Emotional Intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence measures how any individual can comprehend and manage their emotional responses. This is both the recognition of and the self-management of emotional states and the ability to enable others to do the same. Emotional intelligence is a uniquely human result of the interaction between intelligence and emotion. This study will focus on your descriptions of your shared experiences with a particular tutor and your perceptions of the tutor recognising and helping you and the other students in your virtual online classes to modulate their emotional responses.

For this study, Emotional Intelligence will encompass the following attributes.

The ability to understand non-verbal signals

Such as: Body language, Facial expression, Eye contact, Tone of voice

The ability to understand another's feelings

Such as: Empathy (being able to understand another's point of view), Having the ability to clarify what has been said – 'So you are saying....,' Being self-aware, Being confident

The ability to be self-regulating

Such as being flexible, adaptable

The ability to manage conflict and diffuse tense situations.

Such as: Possessing Social skills, being able to build relationships, building rapport, being an active listener

Having a sense of humour and knowing how to use it for effect.

***G: Participant Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire***

To help you prepare for the interview, please take some time to fill in this table of Emotional Intelligence attributes your tutor may have displayed. Keep a copy if you wish and return the completed form to Aelly.Armitage@\*\*\*\*. ac.uk. I shall contact you to arrange your interview.

		never	rarely	sometimes	often	consistently
Does/Did the tutor:						
Make eye contact when speaking.						
Modulate their tone of voice.						
Appear empathetic.						
Clarify the student's points or questions before answering.						
Appear to be confident.						
Have a sense of humour.						
They seem to be flexible in their approach.						
Seem to be adaptable.						
Demonstrate an ability to manage conflict and diffuse tense situations.						
Actively build a relationship with yourself and other students.						

Have a good rapport.						
Appears to be an active listener.						

### ***H: Interview Schedule***

Interview Schedule (points in blue added after the pilot), (points in brown added as the interviews progressed).

Greet, welcome, introduce myself (tell them about me and why I am doing this), thank them, and remind them they do not have to proceed with any or all the interview questions and can have a break or end the interview at any time. Ask for their verbal permission to record, transcribe, and use the data in my study. Ensure they are in a place where they are comfortable sharing information and happy to do so.

Check that the participant is clear that we are discussing their tutor's EI level.

Ask if there is anything they want to know.

Go through the attributes they had previously said the tutor had on their questionnaire, being mindful of the words they use to describe each one.

Perceiving another's emotions-

E.g., Eye contact, voice modulation, and perception of the student's emotions.

Understanding Another's Feelings-

E.g., empathy, clarification, (ask for examples, tell me about a time when you experienced this)

Self-awareness

E.g., confidence, humour, examples- ask for examples

Self-regulation

E.g., building/maintaining relationships, rapport, active listening, ask for examples

Ask them to describe how their tutor demonstrated her EI qualities (describe what (how) they experienced the tutor's EI in the online sessions)

Their perception of the Tutor's EI level- how did they experience this?

Impacts of the tutor's EI on themselves (studies, grades, self)

Is there anything else they want to add?

Thank them and remind them they will be contacted with their transcripts and for extra questions in the future when they can change things or redact them from the study. Check that they have no further questions. (or points to make).

# **I: Journal Extract: The Researcher's Early Thoughts about Emotional Intelligence**

3.10.21

What is EI?

EI

can be a learned ability to identify, explain, understand + express human emotions in healthy + productive ways.

ability to perceive, use, understand, manage + handle emotions.

It is like empathy...

Empathy → means understanding + being aware of own + others feelings.

It's an understanding of what is and isn't being said - understanding non-verbal messages is an important aspect of being empathetic - is this also an important part of being EI?

Major Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence test

MSCEIT - measures across 4 branches of Salovey's EI model. It assesses:  
• ability to perceive, identify, understand + manage emotions

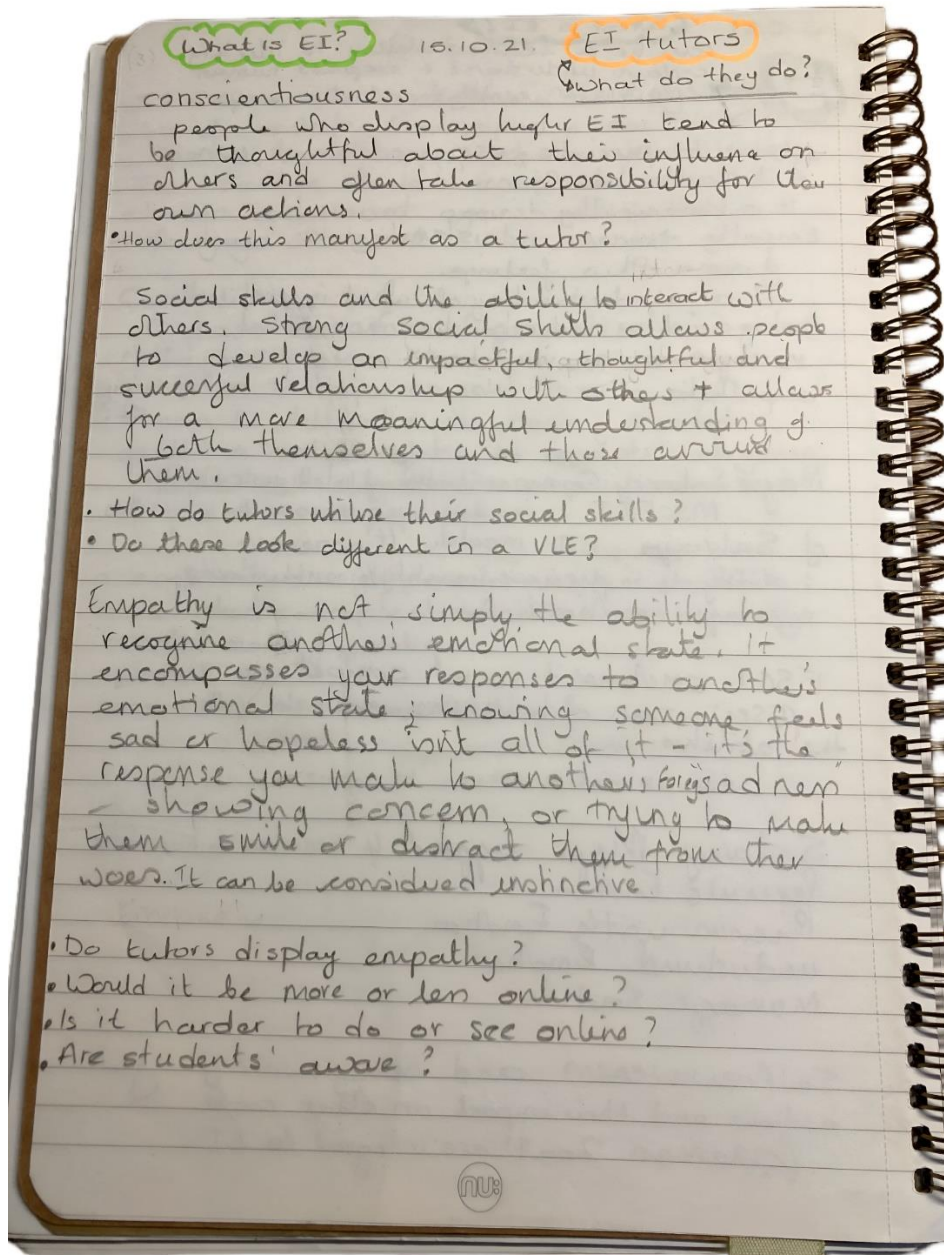
ESCI Emotional + social competence inventory (ESCI) - an older version example rate the abilities

Salovey-Mayer suggested 4 branches to consider  
Perceive Emotion  
Reason with Emotion  
understand Emotion  
Manage Emotion

Self-awareness and being aware of your actions and their impact on other people.  
(Goleman 2009) are integral to EI



**J: Journal Extract: The Researcher's Early Thoughts about Tutors' EI.**



**K: Journal Extract: The Researcher's Early Findings about Husserl**

17.10.21 Husserl's Phenomenology "What is it like to be"

Most P<sub>igots</sub> we cite Husserl (Father of P<sub>i</sub>) or his student Heidegger as the foundation of this research. (Giorgi 2000 p.10). The 2 founders diverge

Husserl - transcendental or descriptive P<sub>i</sub>  
He considered knowledge to be based on experiences (Draucker 1999) and had a focus based on describing phenomena as people are aware + can consciously choose to remember their own thoughts feelings + emotions

Transcendental P<sub>i</sub> is built on an epistemological world view, that engages with a singular + unique knowledge to produce a collective experience.

Its focus is on was on determining meaning and the essence of the P<sub>i</sub>. It emphasises subjectivity + the discovery of the essence of the experience by focusing on "the things as they appear" (Moustakas 1994)

The researcher sets aside their own understandings + use P<sub>i</sub> reduction - which derives the essence of the P<sub>i</sub>.

epoché - the removal of own judgement + bracketing - removal of the researcher's <sup>prior</sup> experiences

all 3 work to eliminate a R's preconceived bias.

The researcher uses imaginative variation to decide which elements make up the essence of the P<sub>i</sub> (Moustakas 94)

Giorgi 1985 + Moustakas 1994 were greatly influenced by Husserl and their approaches although differ remain true to Husserl's approach.

**L: Journal Extract: The Researcher's Early Findings about Heidegger**

5.12.21 Heideggerian Hermeneutic Interpretive Phenomenology

"What does it mean to experience?"

Husserl's student broadened (P) by focussing on "being in the world" not "knowing the world". Heidegger did not feel it was possible to set aside one's understanding of experience, but he felt a prior knowledge of a subject (P) enabled deeper questioning and a better grasp of a (P) through prior understanding and thus (P) moved from being purely descriptive to a hermeneutic interpretivism, which considers both experience as well as underlying dynamics with the goal of uncovering what may be hidden (Crotty 1988).

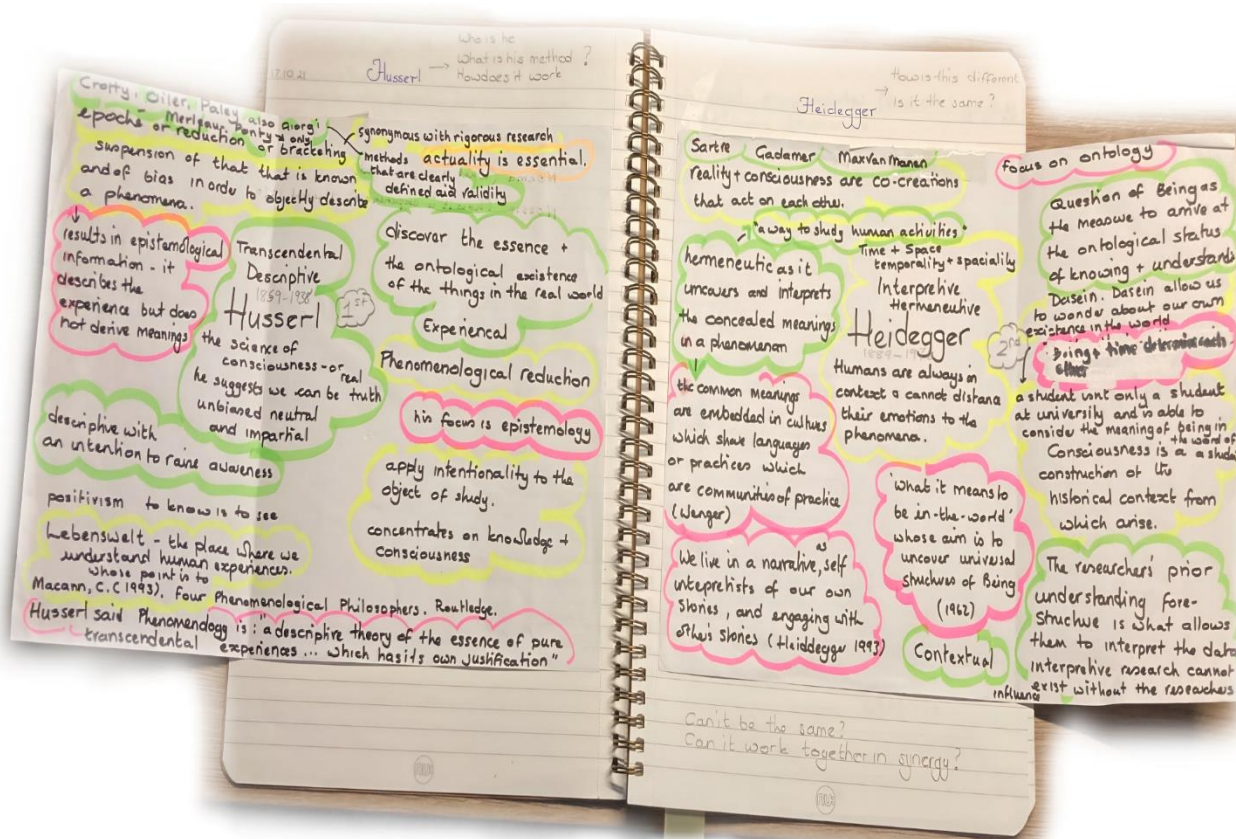
Heidegger utilised 'Dasein' (Heidegger 1927/1993 p.20) Dasein is being in the world - so what is it like to be in the world of...

Human existence (Dasein) can be understood + interpreted by deep understanding of language, culture + social traditions + norms. The method of uncovering is *hermeneutic* (for not forgetting or remembering).

Heideggerian (P) is not in isolation but rather acknowledges outside practices + influences, so the understanding + prior knowledge of the researcher allows for a deeper interpretation of the data.

Gadamer 1976 + Van Manen 1990 are 2 human scientists whose work aligns them to HHP.

# M: Journal Extract: Husserl and Heidegger's Phenomenological Methodologies





***N: Interview with Participant ii Showing the Beginning of Coding using Colour to Differentiate Themes***

Descriptive	AA	Interpretive
	Can you give examples of times when perhaps somebody was not looking very happy, not answering very quickly, or looked cross, and **** picked up on that? Do you think?	
	ii	
Clarifying before answering The blue coding indicates Awareness of others' feelings OEA.	Yeah, I remember like one of the one of my teammates, and I think **** asked a question, and she gave an answer, but I don't think she understood the question properly. She wasn't understanding the content properly, so her answer was all over it so. I think she (****) read her expression and the way she was like describing the answer. But she realized that maybe she doesn't understand it properly. So, then she went over the content again, which was really good. So, she can understand the um, content better.	The tutor would realise that the students had not understood the answers they were giving and would re-phrase what she had said to enable them to understand the concept.
	AA	
	OK, oh, that's good	
	OK, and were you ever aware of when she perhaps read any cues you gave?	
	ii	
	Not that I remember, no,	
	AA	
	Ok thank you	
	Do you feel that she tried to make eye contact with you?	
	ii	
	yeah	
	AA	
	So, she was talking to you specifically and not all around the room?	
	ii	
	Yeah yeah.	
	AA	
	How did that make you feel?	
	ii	
Voice modulation the green coding indicates Self-regulation SRE	Yeah, she made it really interesting. I felt like I mattered. I really enjoyed that module. She made it seem really interesting and like I could do well in it. She used her voice to help us understand and to like keep us listening and interested really.	Despite being remote, the tutor was able to interest the students in the topics by carefully modulating her voice.

***O: Interview with Participant iii, Extracts were Chosen and Colour-coded to the Themes, and Early Interpretive Notes were added.***

<u>Descriptive Coding:</u>  Confidence Red coding is used here to be self-aware, confident, and have a sense of humour.  SEA 3m	<u>Participant's Extract:</u> Well, she just obviously I've never done a degree before, so from my point of view. She came across as really knowledgeable. She made doing the major study look easy. Yeah. Uh, and. I like the idea that she broke it down into steps 'cause, obviously, this is what put my put me off doing a degree earlier. The major study, so she she just made it look so simple, and she didn't take it too seriously? There's not as if to stress us out. Uhm? Yeah, so it's quite nice that it worked for me. It was quite nice. I didn't feel stressed with it.	<u>Interpretive Coding:</u> The tutor was confident in their capabilities and the topic they were working on. The tutor wanted the students to understand that she had confidence in them and their abilities, so she used different methods to enable them to break the task into smaller, easier-to-do chunks. This was done in a humorous way to avoid making the students feel under too much pressure.
Sense of humour.  OEA 3n	Yeah, she was. She was really welcoming and, you know, friendly and not bang bang and, you know like some tutors come across as really serious. She wasn't like that.	The tutor was warm and friendly, which the student appreciated and compared favourably to other tutors.
Being Flexible Green coding is used for self-regulating examples. SRE 3o	But when people ask questions, she would answer them. Sometimes they and then, but then if there is a load of questions being asked, she would ask, she asked us to wait at the end.	The tutor was available to answer the students' questions, incorporating them into the lecture or just having a question-and-answer session at the end of the lecture.
Build a rapport Orange coding is used to identify the tutor's use of social skills.  3p	During the lectures, we would talk about things and have experiences of what she were talking about and then like she would always direct us back, and she would join in the conversation and say like you had made a good comment about something, she would say. "Yeah, that's really important." That and stuff like that. And then we shared what we knew about that, and, Yeah, she was really positive for the feedback.	The tutor participated in group discussions and gave the students positive verbal feedback when they contributed to the discussions and raised valid points.
Build a rapport OEA 3q	I mean it, and of course, that's why you don't always know everything, but when you do, it's nice to just say something and get some feedback back.	The students appreciated that when they made a valid point, the tutor quickly pointed this out to everyone.
Build a rapport  OEA 3r	If I'm stuck with something, I'll email the tutor, but so my my friends they won't, so I know that once I send an email to her, I always got a response. Uh, so I appreciated that, so I think I had that rapport with a er her, yeah.	The student was aware that they had a rapport with the tutor; they knew the tutor would respond to emails, so they were not concerned about contacting the tutor when they wanted to.
Active listening  OEA 3s	Should, yeah, she would never interrupt any of us; really, we was talking about an experience about something she'd let us finish and then discuss or move on. Uh, now or say, is anybody else having Any similar experiences or things like that?	The tutor allowed the students the time they needed to articulate their thoughts and expand on their ideas, frequently auditing the group to see if there were common problems that several were experiencing.

***P: Extract Alignment Across Participants Showing Data from Participants i, ii, iii and iv (Participant numbers bottom left of each extract)***

Feedback		
EI Feedback Permeant	And I feel that for my first assignment was helpful. Yeah, because I took in that so not really have to do with the class. Uh, my feedback on my assignments was helpful. Uh, I took the feedback into my other modules to my other classes and I'm still using the feedback like till today because yeah.	The lecturer provided timely and relevant feedback to many of the student's later assignments, which the student appreciated and still followed the advice in their subsequent assignments.
1n EI encouraging 4ppp	Obviously, she would just say if I wasn't doing the right thing Well, but when I think of it, but I I did feel she she was very good at saying, oh, you are on the right track. Go, go!	The tutor's encouragement and positivity made the students work diligently to achieve high grades.
Critical observations of the tutor		
EI 2L	But I feel like sometimes maybe she might have misunderstood. like when you talk about the assignments, or we might have phrased it in a way that she might not have understood it properly. So, then we'd like ask her to like we would maybe frame our question differently.	The student was demonstrating back to the tutor their own EI.
Encouraging the group of students		
EI Inclusivity empathy	Yeah, I think it made me feel more like part of the team and made me feel more confident. So, I felt like I was able to contribute more.	The student responded to the tutor's EI, making her feel like they were working towards a common goal together. In turn, this enabled the student to participate and found she understood the topic better and could contribute more to discussions.
2n EI welcoming friendly	Yeah I uh felt welcomed and included.	As a result of the tutor being aware of the student's non-verbal cues and making an effort to ensure the student understood, the student felt as though she was valued.
3t Observations of the Tutor's EI 4ttt available	There, for all of us. From what my observations were I would say.	The tutor was fair and divided their time, so each student had the attention needed to accomplish the task.

# Q: Journal Extract: Aligning Data Themes and Literature Findings

22.8.23		
Literature	Participants	
Communities of Practice ① → D	A Encouragement	
Emotional regulation ② → CA	AA rapport	
femininity ③ → AC	• AB clarification	
	• AC empathy	
Intercultural ④ → BB	B Interpersonal relationships	
relations with social interaction ⑤ → BC	• BA active listening	
	• CB inclusivity	
	• BC relationship building	
EI workforce ⑥ → AB	C Approachability	
tutors EI + Stress ⑦ → D	• CA adaptability	
tutors performance ⑧ → CB	• CB self-regulation	
	• CC conflict management	
Self Efficacy ⑨ → BA	D Interest in Others	
developing EI ⑩ → D	• DA eye contact	
	• DB non-verbal comms	
	• DC voice modulation	
Where do things converge, what illuminates the other?		
What are the disparate outliers? Do they detract or enhance?		
What is obvious? What is less so?		
Where do 1, 6, 7 + 10 align?		
What about AA, BA + CC?		
	Encouragement	
	EI workforce build rapport	
	• empathetic femininity	
	inclusivity in intercultural	
	interpersonal relationships built on social interactions	
	Emotional regulation of the self	
	Tutors EI + performance as an ability to conflict manage	
	Self Efficacy + adaptability	
	Community of practice to include nonverbal communication	
	Tutors stress in the VLE	
	encouragement from an EI workforce	
	working in a role requiring EI	
	tutor EI + academic subtext	
	Titles for lit review:-	
	1 EI workforce	
	2 working in a role with social interaction	
	3 EI COP	
	4 EI + Self Efficacy	
	5 EI + tutor performance	
	6 EI + Emotional regulation	
	7 EI + intercultural	
	8 femininity + EI	
	9 EI + tutor stress	
	10 Developing EI	
	Approachability	
	5 Emotional regulation of trust	
	6 Tutors' performance to conflict manage	
	7 Self Efficacy (adaptability)	
	8 Interest in Others	
	Community of Practice - non-verbal	
	empathetic	
	VLE	
	9 tutors EI + stress	



## R: Journal Extract: Reflections on the Participant's Voices

Pandemic: Perspectives (Casas 2019)  
Newland Mpulam Strousse (2022)

28.11.22

Would Bronfenbrenner's Eco model (1986) help or be a useful framework for understanding? Do I need it? Is it useful?

I need to understand the participants' perceptions of the tutors' EI

What do they know? How did they experience it?

need to consider the different multi-layered contexts (Eriksson et al 2018)  
what about the students' own EI?

an important factor is students' perceptions of tutor EI; the interactions between the student + tutor between the tutor + the students and their subsequent interpersonal relationship within the VLE. Their words are good predictors of students perceiving and warming to the tutors' EI, even in the remote access of the VLE.

What caused the shift to online education?

could a pandemic resulted in major contextual changes for students globally. Institutions closed their doors to open classes and delivered their learning in an online manner - This was unexpected - they didn't sign up for online classes

How does my study help? What does it add?  
What is important? What do I know?

What is missing from the discourse surrounding the importance of tutors' EI levels is the voice of the students these tutors interact with.

This research places students at the centre of its research in order to explore their subjective perspectives of the @ of being taught online by an EI tutor. Very few studies have considered student's perspectives (eg??) and none of those were in the UK. This has resulted in a gap in the literature concerning students' views of the tutor's EI level and its perceived impact on themselves. The purpose of this @ thesis is to illuminate students' experiences of having an EI tutor.

**S: Journal Extract Understanding how Husserl and Heidegger's Approaches can be used in Synthesis**

24.10.21

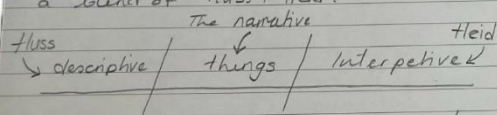
Husserl / Heidegger

How far apart are they?

Hus requires no prior knowledge or, for that reason to be set apart (bracketed) a tacit letting go of knowledge so the participant's knowing becomes the truth of the knowing and the way of being.

Heid demands prior knowledge to reveal the understanding via interpretation. An empathetic revelation of the knowledge that is impossible without fore-knowledge to reveal the things. How do we find the participant in this world? What do they forget or dismiss via vergessenheit?

If we use Watts isn't his method focus a blend of Hus + Heid?



Is this Aquinas' fusion?  
Is this synthesis?

Husserl on transcendental (descriptive) 26.10.21

