

Impact of Emotional Intelligence amongst 1st Generation University Marketing Students and Those with College Experience in Their Family

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Abstract: Emotional intelligence has been recognized as important for success in the business world. Leadership, team work and success in sales are dependent on a degree of emotional intelligence. This study looks at the impact of emotional intelligence on success amongst students and specifically compares the experience of 1st generation students with those who have college experience in the family. Results suggest that aspects of emotional intelligence such as self control do have an influence on student performance. This impact is greater for 1st generation students than for others. This suggests that activities designed to strengthen emotional intelligence would be a benefit to students early in an academic program. It also suggests that universities with large numbers of 1st generation students might incorporate such activities into mentoring programs as well for students who are at risk academically.

Key words: emotional intelligence, EI, 1st generation students, student performance

1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as the “ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote both better emotion and thought” (Mayer and Salovey, 1997, p. 22). EI is of interest to marketing educators and educators in general because it involves the ability to generate accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotion knowledge to enhance thought (Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade, 2008).

A variety of studies have investigated the impact on student performance. For example, Zeidner, Shani-Zinovich, Matthews, and Roberts (2005), reported that EI was higher for gifted compared to non-gifted seventh through 10th grade Israeli students. Also, Petrides, Fredericksen, and Furnham (2004) reported in a study of 650 pupils in British secondary education (mean age 16.5 years old) that EI moderated the relationship between cognitive ability and academic performance. In addition, students with high EI scores were less likely to have unauthorized absences from school.

On the other hand, Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, and Majeski (2003) examined the impact of EI and academic success of 372 first-year full-time students at a small Ontario university in Canada transitioning from high school to the university reported divergent results depending on how academic success was operationalized.

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When the total sample was aggregated EI scores were found to be poor predictors of academic success (e.g., only predicting 8–10% of the variability in first-year GPA). However, when pupils were divided into successful (first-year GPA 80% or better) and compared with unsuccessful (first-year GPA 59% or less) students, academic success was strongly associated with several dimensions of EI (e.g., intrapersonal, adaptability, and stress management ability) assessed at the start of the year. These variables were found to be strong predictors in identifying 82% of academically successful and 91% of academically unsuccessful students.

Emotional intelligence may also have an even greater effect on the performance of groups that are vulnerable to stereotypes of lower academic performance versus those that are not (Spencer et al., 1999). One such group is the first generation student. These are defined as students who are from a family in which neither the father nor the mother have a college education. Those students who have college experience in the family are referred to in this study as “other students”. Research has already started to identify factors involved with and educational approaches that can increase the confidence of first generation university students in their ability to control their educational progress (James et al., 2006). This study looks into EI as one of these factors impacting on first generation students and contrasts it with its affect on other students.

1.1 Rationale for Study

The purpose of this study is to extend the literature and build on existing studies to examine the impact of EI on 1st generation and other university marketing student performance.

1.2 Emotional Intelligence

EI is comprised of four skills or dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2008; Bradberry and Greves, 2005). Briefly, self-awareness is the capacity for understanding one’s emotions, strengths, and weakness. The keystone of EI is the ability to recognize a feeling. Once the feeling is identified the next task is to develop the ability to monitor the feelings from moment to moment to obtain psychological insight and self-understanding. That is, an inability to notice our true feeling leaves us at our feeling’s mercy. The assumption is that if we have greater certainty about our feelings, we can better direct ourselves. Another related aspect of EI is self-management which is the capacity for effectively managing one’s motives and regulating one’s behavior. That is, handling feelings so they are appropriate is an ability that builds self-awareness. It is the ability to claim oneself, and to eliminate anxiety, irritability, and sadness. This ability gives an individual the ability to recover more quickly after a setback. In other words, the delaying of gratification and stifling impulsiveness is the essence of emotional self-control. EI also encompasses social awareness which is the capacity for understanding what others are saying and feeling and why they feel and act as they do. This ability focuses on the concept of empathy which is recognizing the emotions in others. People who are empathic are more attuned to the subtle signals that indicate what other need or want. The last component of EI is relationship management which is the capacity for acting in such a way that one is able to get desired results from others and reach personal goals. A large part of this ability is the skill in managing the emotions of others. This skill is demonstrated in popularity, leadership and interpersonal effectiveness.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the dimensions of EI, three research questions will be examined in this paper:

- Q1.** Do the dimensions of EI predict successful academic performance over time?
- Q2.** Do the dimension of EI of 1st generation students and others change in the same way over time?
- Q3.** How does differences in EI of 1st generation students and others impact performance over time.

2. Method

Data were collected for this study from one professor's class of a basic marketing course of 134 students at a large public university in the Southwestern United States. Data were collected at three intervals throughout the semester.

Students were given extra credit to fill out an online survey regarding their perceptions of how they handle and react to emotions. Scores were then recorded for each of the students, names kept anonymous, for examinations at three points in the semester. These exam scores were matched up with the perceptions of the students.

For all questions on the online survey, the response options consisted of a seven-point Likert scale anchored by "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (7). Scores for each of the ten measures were derived by averaging the responses to each respective three-item scale. Altogether there were 22 scale items.

All of these items were part of an emotional inventory from Goleman (2005). Discriminant validity was assessed by a factor analysis testing the dimensionality of the variables. The scale was found to have a 4-factor model as the best fit. Six questions were discarded in the final analysis for a total of 16 items that were used in the study.

The first measure was an assessment of emotional expressiveness ($M = 5.30$, $\alpha = .82$). Expressiveness was measured by five scale items. These items included "confront issues when I feel bad about what is happening", "I am honest with my feelings", "When I get annoyed or frustrated with someone else's behavior, I express my feelings verbally and appropriately", "I am aware of my non-verbal expressions", and "I keep my sense of humor shape".

The second factor was a measure of awareness of feelings ($M = 5.11$, $\alpha = .82$). This awareness measure assessed how self aware the students in the marketing class were of their own emotions. The five items included "I take time to reflect on my feelings", "I take responsibility for my emotions and happiness", "I monitor my emotions and feelings as I have them", "I manage my feelings by thinking about them", and "I listen with empathy and non-judgment".

Self control of emotions was a third factor ($M = 5.02$, $\alpha = .63$). The three items in this measure included "I am self-motivated", "I am able to soothe myself and shake off bad moods" and "I aware that the world is empty and meaningless and that I put the meaning into anything around me." The last factor was assertiveness, asserting one's self interest ($M = 4.90$, $\alpha = .66$). This measure's two items included "I assertively express my needs and wants" and "I avoid people who I feel put me down."

In addition to the above emotional intelligence measures, there were also items measuring student GPA and exams. GPA was the overall university GPA of the students. There were three exams measuring student performance given at different times during the semester.

3. Results

A linear regression was done to examine the relationships between these emotional intelligence measures, student GPA and scores on the first examination. The overall model was statistically significant (adj. $R^2 = 0.14$, $F = 3.85$, $p < 0.00$). For this first exam, only the GPA was statistically significant (Std. $\beta = 0.30$; $p < 0.01$).

A similar regression was also run for the scores on the second exam. The overall model was again

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statistically significant with a little better fit ($\text{adj. } R^2 = 0.15$, $F = 3.71$, $p < 0.00$). For this second exam, GPA was again statistically significant ($\text{Std. } \beta = 0.27$; $p < 0.00$), but for this exam self control ($\text{Std. } \beta = 0.29$; $p = 0.01$) and awareness of feelings ($\text{Std. } \beta = -0.23$; $p = 0.05$) were significant as well.

Lastly, a regression was run for the scores on the third exam. The overall model was statistically significant ($\text{adj. } R^2 = 0.17$, $F = 2.90$, $p = 0.01$). For this third exam, overall GPA was statistically significant ($\text{Std. } \beta = 0.30$; $p < 0.01$), but self control was also significant again ($\text{Std. } \beta = 0.20$; $p = 0.05$).

Students were divided into two groups for this exploratory study to determine the differential effects of emotional intelligence on 1st generation students versus those whose parents have experience with a college education. There were 63 students in the 1st generation group and 71 students in the group with parental experience in college hereafter referred to as “others”.

Correlations were performed on the emotional intelligence measures, GPA as well as the exam scores. This was done for both first generation students and for other students with college educational experience in their family. The first generation student results are displayed in Table 1 and the results for other students in Table 2.

Table 1 First Generation Emotional Intelligence Measure Correlations

Exam 1							
Exam2	.57**						
Exam3	.60**	.62**					
GPA	.38**	.15	.20				
Expressive	.11	.10	.09	-.12			
Aware of Feelings	-.10	-.18	-.12	-.06	.45**		
Self Control	.22	.26*	.30*	.03	.49**	.31*	
Assertive	-.04	-.16	.00	.10	.30*	.30*	.17

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 2 Family College Experience Emotional Intelligence Measure Correlations

Exam 1							
Exam2	.30*						
Exam3	.35**	.55**					
GPA	.21	.39**	.40**				
Expressive	.11	.05	.20	.25*			
Aware of Feelings	.01	-.04	.10	-.02	.57**		
Self Control	.08	.11	.12	.13	.70**	.59*	
Assertive	-.02	-.11	.00	-.03	.45*	.42*	.42*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Results found that self control of emotions is positively related to the second ($r = .26$, $p < .05$) and third exam scores ($r = .30$, $p < .05$) amongst first generation students, but not with other students. Overall GPA also has a different relationship with class exam scores for first generation students than for other students who have college experience in the family. For first generation students, GPA is related to scores on the first exam ($r = .38$, $p < .01$) but not on the second or third exams. By contrast, amongst other students there is a significant relationship between GPA and scores for the second ($r = .39$, $p < .01$) and third exams ($r = .40$, $p < .01$) but not for the first exam.

4. Discussion

These results suggest that components of emotional intelligence, specifically self control of emotions, can help students to do better in class over time. At first, on the first exam, overall GPA is the only one of the factors measured that is directly related to class performance. This certainly makes sense since the GPA is undoubtedly a proxy for study skills, experience and other factors that give some students an advantage over others. Over time, better self control over emotions seems to be related to performance. Perhaps those students who are better able to control their emotions and get down to work are also able to perform better on exams and other class work.

This may also be the reason why awareness of emotions is negatively related to performance on the second exam. In the middle of the semester those students who are too distracted by emotions may not perform as well on exams. This is likely to be the time of the semester where students have the most free time. By contrast, in the beginning and end of the semester these emotional influences may not make as much of a difference since students are too busy to worry about them.

These components of emotional intelligence seem to more important for first generation students than for students who have some college educational background. Self control was a factor related to success on exams for first generation students but not for others. Perhaps those whose parents have experience in college are already prepared for the experience. Since they know what to expect, emotional control may not provide as many advantages as it would with first generation students who are setting out on relatively new territory.

Lastly, past performance in the university as measured by GPA seems to be a good predictor of class performance for students whose families have college experience but not for first generation students. These students are likely to already have a set system of how to study in courses and graduate from college. By contrast, first generation students may be negotiating their own paths in college courses, experimenting with emotional management, study strategies and even trial and error to a much greater extent than others.

5. Applications for Educators

These results suggest that by helping students to systematize their studying habits and time management, especially in those classrooms where there are large numbers of first generation students, marketing instructors are enabling them to overcome emotional management differences to achieve their potential. Assignments which are given step by step, with clear instructions and an organized syllabus are some of the ways in which this could be accomplished. In addition, instructors can also be more proactive with students who may appear to be slacking off, but who are not aware that they have to follow through to finish assignments regardless of how life is making them feel at the time.

In addition, colleges could set up programs or incorporate units into already established courses that would help to develop students' emotional intelligence. Some existing software such as Harvard Business School's "Leading Teams With Emotional Intelligence" have scenarios designed to enable students to think through various situations they might encounter in the workplace. Depending on how a particular student reacts, they are then guided to an appropriate set of lessons that can help them learn how to improve.

Another suggestion stemming from these results is that universities with large populations of 1st generation students could expand mentoring programs for students who are at risk academically. Students whose family members have some college education already have this mentor network that 1st generation students lack.

Students who fail to show up in class regularly, turn in assignments or exhibit other signs of difficulty with the learning environment could have a mentor, maybe a peer mentor, to talk with and guide them. Honor students or perhaps honor students who are 1st generation students could be great mentors and examples to their peers.

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