**Leveraging Students’ Emotional Intelligence: An intelligent Approach to Higher Education Strategy**

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1. **Introduction and Background**

In the realm of higher education, the pursuit of excellence is an ongoing endeavour, as institutions strive to enhance students' learning experiences and improve educational outcomes (Zhoc *et al.,* 2018; Zhoc *et al.,* 2020; Meher *et al.,* 2021; Chang *et al.,* 2022; Muhtadi *et al.,* 2022; Quílez-Robers *et al.,* 2023). Emotional Intelligence (EI) emerged as a major phycological construction in the early 1990s. Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 189) depicted that EI is *“…an ability to monitor one’s own feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.”* They argued that individuals high in EI had certain emotional abilities and skills related to appraising and regulating emotions in the self and others. Accordingly, it was argued that individuals high in EI could accurately perceive certain emotions in themselves and others (e.g., anger, sadness) and regulate emotions in themselves and others to achieve a range of adaptive outcomes or emotional states (e.g., motivation, creative thinking) (O’Connor *et al.,* 2019).

EI and its influence on academic performance have been the subject of extensive research in various academic fields, particularly in the context of higher education. Alabbasi *et al.,* (2023) conducted a multilevel meta-analysis and systematic review, which challenges the extent to which EI predicts academic success in medical programs. Their findings suggest that while EI does play a role, the relationship is relatively weak. Almegewly *et al.,* (2022) explored the correlation between EI and academic achievement among undergraduate nursing students, providing insights into the context of healthcare education. A cross-sectional study by Chew *et al.,* (2013) investigated the relationship between EI and academic performance in first and final year medical students, shedding light on potential variations across academic years. Furthermore, Hussainy *et al.,* (2022) examined the influence of EI on academic performance among university students, demonstrating the significance of emotional intelligence in higher education settings.

A growing body of research suggests that EI as an capacity to perceive, understand, and manage emotions, is emerging as a pivotal factor in shaping students' academic performance and overall success (Pekrun *et al.,* 2011; Perera and DiGiacomo, 2013; Urquijo and Extremera, 2017; Maguire *et al.,* 2017; Zhoc *et al.,* 2018; Khan, 2019; Zhoc *et al.,* 2020; Sánchez-Álvarez, *et al.,* 2020; Meher *et al.,* 2021; Chang and Tsai, 2022; Hussainy *et al.,* 2022; Quílez-Robers *et al.,* 2023).

* 1. ***Emotional Intelligence Components and Academic Performance***

Recent research explores EI components and their impact on academic success across various disciplines. Alabbasi *et al.,* (2023) find a weak predictive relationship in medical programs, highlighting potential contextual disparities. In contrast, Almegewly *et al.,* (2022) show a positive correlation among nursing students, emphasizing empathy as a crucial EI subcomponent fostering positive educational interactions. Hussainy *et al.,* (2022) stress EI's significance in higher education, underscoring the interplay of motivation and self-awareness. The ability to recognize and understand emotions emerges as pivotal for academic success. Khan's (2019) comparative analysis extends this understanding to business students, emphasizing the distinct impacts of both EI and IQ on academic performance.

Cultural contexts shape EI's relationship with academic outcomes (Senthil *et al.,* 2022), while educators benefit from EI components in teaching interactions (Meher *et al.,* 2021). Muhtadi *et al.,* (2022) note a modest positive relationship in mathematics, highlighting subject-specific influences. Quílez-Robers *et al.,* (2023) argue for a positive but relatively weak relationship, emphasizing EI as one of multiple contributing factors.

Collectively, the literature reveals intricate connections between EI components and academic success, acknowledging variations influenced by fields of study, cultural contexts, and specific EI elements. Positive correlations coexist with weak or subject-specific associations, underscoring the nuanced impact of EI on academic outcomes.

* 1. ***Emotional Intelligence: Models and Critical Analysis***

EI, introduced in the early 1990s (Salovey and Mayer, 1990), has spurred the development of over 30 measurement tools and models (O’Connor *et al.,* 2019). While numerous models are discussed in literature, key frameworks include the Mayer and Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory. The MSCEIT focuses on skill-based aspects, emphasizing effective recognition, understanding, and management of emotions. Its application to educational performance remains unclear. In contrast, the EQ-i relies on self-reporting, assessing a broad range of emotional competencies, introducing potential self-reporting bias affecting predictive power in academic success.

In contrast, Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory, influential across psychological and business domains, underscores practical utility in daily life. This approach resonates across diverse audiences, promoting emotional well-being and interpersonal skills. Research correlates higher EI levels with enhanced emotional well-being and improved academic and workplace performance (Maguire *et al.,* 2017; Goleman *et al.,* 2002). Goleman's theory integrates elements from self-determination theory, enhancing its comprehensiveness (Tang & He, 2023). However, criticism of Goleman's theory arises from the lack of consensus on EI's definition and components. Varied models and measures contribute to a challenging unified framework (Perera & DiGiacomo, 2013). Self-report reliance raises concerns of subjectivity and limited introspection (Bastian *et al.,* 2005). Critics argue potential overemphasis on EI at the expense of cognitive abilities and personality traits (Szczygiel & Mikolajczak, 2017). The theory's global applicability faces challenges due to cultural variations (Kong *et al.,* 2012). While Goleman's theory offers practical benefits, its limitations, including lack of consensus, measurement challenges, and limited predictive power, necessitate critical consideration. Despite promotion of emotional intelligence, researchers and practitioners should explore its contextual relevance in specific populations and settings.

The paper is driven by the ambition to delve into the critical intersection of EI and higher education. It endeavours to construct an empirical model that underscores the profound influence of students’ EI on their educational performance, specifically assessed through Grade Point Average (GPA). GPA serves as a well-established metric to gauge students' academic achievements and is an integral aspect of the educational landscape. By developing an empirical model centred on GPA, this research aims to provide universities with a robust tool for advancing their education intelligence. Education intelligence, defined here as the capacity to harness emotional intelligence for educational success, is becoming increasingly recognized as a critical determinant in the competitive environment of modern education.

Furthermore, drawing from a wealth of academic sources and empirical data, this paper seeks to unravel the intricate relationship between EI and GPA. It is within this dynamic nexus that higher education institutions can uncover innovative strategies to maximize students’ potential and foster holistic development. By integrating emotional intelligence as a cornerstone in higher education strategy, universities can create an environment that not only imparts academic knowledge but also cultivates emotional resilience, empathy, and interpersonal skills, which are vital attributes for thriving in the rapidly evolving landscape of education. As education continues to evolve, this paper asserts that education intelligence, driven by emotional intelligence, will be a critical success factor in the ongoing commoditization of education.

This paper, thus, embarks on a journey to illuminate the path for institutions seeking to harness the full potential of their students by nurturing their emotional intelligence within the higher education setting.

1. **Methodology**

Structural Equation Methodology (SEM) has been used to examine the impact of emotional intelligence (EQ-exogenous latent) on students work outcomes, namely (a) cognitive work outcomes, (b) social work outcomes and (c) self-growth outcomes (endogenous latent). The EQ strength act as a proxy variable (exogenous latent/endo generous latent) particularly measuring the accumulated impact from exogenous latent (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills perspective) and predicting the work outcomes of the students. SEM offers a systematic and robust approach to examine the (a) conclusive impact of EQ on students’ performance, (b) validate the multicollinearity, (c) tracing the path co-efficiencies and (d) validating violation of causal independence. As stated, they are critical to validate the robustness of the SEM on CFA/EFA- data fit the model/model fit the data. The impact of accumulated measures from the four distinct perspectives becomes the exogenous variable (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills perspective), the ability to create value of EQ strength act as a proxy variable and its value reflections on student work outcomes (cognitive work outcomes, social work outcomes and self-growth outcomes become the endogenous variables. Further, SEM offers the luxury of either using quantitative (confirmatory factor analysis) or qualitative (exploratory factor analysis) approaches depending upon the nature of the EQ measure.

The SEM grounded on Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), based on 410 higher education students’ responses, collected across universities in Wales. The model gives strategic importance for regulating the GPA of students proactively and effectively in universities. The results of the hypotheses validate, that the emotional intelligence on GPA is realistic and which requires rigorous investigation, satisfying the better need on emotional theoretic dimension.

1. **Conclusion**

In the pursuit of educational excellence within higher education, EI has emerged as a pivotal factor influencing students' academic performance. Defined as the ability to monitor, discriminate, and use emotions to guide thinking and actions, EI has garnered extensive attention and research. This paper navigated through the intricate landscape of EI's impact on academic outcomes, shedding light on its multifaceted dimensions. As the paper delved into the empirical model, employing Structural Equation Methodology (SEM) to examine the impact of EI on students' work outcomes, it positioned education intelligence—defined as the capacity to harness emotional intelligence for educational success—as a critical determinant in the modern educational landscape. GPA served as a metric to gauge academic achievements, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to education that incorporates emotional resilience, empathy, and interpersonal skills.

This paper provided universities with a robust tool for advancing their education intelligence, urging them to integrate emotional intelligence into higher education strategy. It emphasized the evolving landscape of education, asserting that education intelligence, driven by emotional intelligence, will be a critical success factor. By nurturing emotional intelligence within the higher education setting, institutions can unlock the full potential of their students and prepare them for success in a competitive and dynamic educational environment.

The exploration of EI components underscored the nuanced relationships between empathy, motivation, and self-awareness, and academic success across diverse disciplines. While some studies indicated a weak predictive relationship, others demonstrated positive correlations, emphasizing the contextual disparities and subject-specific influences. Cultural contexts and the role of educators further added layers to the complexity of this relationship.

The critical analysis of EI models, including the MSCEIT and EQ-i, highlighted the skill-based and self-reporting approaches, each with its strengths and limitations. Goleman's influential theory, while resonating across diverse audiences, faced scrutiny for its lack of consensus and potential overemphasis on EI. The practical utility of EI in daily life, as advocated by Goleman, was acknowledged, but the paper urged researchers and practitioners to consider its limitations critically.

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