ASSESSING THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF SRI LANKAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:
Success in higher education is an effective way of securing gainful employments, and career development for the youth in Sri Lanka. High school students have to be successful in Advanced Level (A-Level) Examination to secure entry to state universities, and to secure better employment opportunities for the school leavers. This has made A-Level examination ultra competitive and highly stressful among the students. The study focussed to assess the Emotional Intelligence (EI) level of high school students. Specific objectives included assessing of EI sub constructs of students, and analyzing the EI of respondents based on gender, and specific subject streams. Genos EI Inventory was used among 90 A-Level students (45 boys, and 45 girls) randomly selected from two Sri Lankan schools. EI level of respondents were further assessed based on gender and their subject streams. Mean values indicated a superior level of EI among boys, in comparison to girls. Science subject stream based students possessed a slightly superior level of EI in comparison to Commerce, and Arts subject stream based students. High school adolescents have found it difficult to manage their emotional situations. This emphasizes the necessity of providing counselling opportunities to high school students, and promoting improved relationships with parents, and teachers. Programmes to support the emotional stability of high school students could empower them. Further research is recommended to examine the relationship between EI and academic progress of Sri Lankan high school students.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, high school students, adolescence.

1. SRI LANKAN SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM

The educational system of Sri Lanka derives from the British educational system, which was introduced by the British colonial masters in the 19th century. The British colonial government established colleges for boys and girls. These colleges consisted of Primary Schools, Lower Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools. In 1938 the education in Government schools made free of charge as consequence of the Universal Franchise granted in 1931.Subsequently many government schools, called 'Maha Vidyalayas' were started in all parts of the country. The medium of education was either Sinhala or Tamil. Primary education lasts five years. Secondary education lasts for six years, and students sit for a government examination General Certificate of Education (Ordinary level) to qualify for Advanced Level education. After two years, students sit for the competitive General Certificate of Education in Advanced level examination (GCE/ AL) (refer Table 1).

Table 1: Time structure of school education structure in Sri Lanka

Stage	Grades	No of years
Primary	1–5	5
Junior Secondary	6–9	4
Secondary (GCE / Ordinary Level)	10–11	2
Collegiate (GCE / Advanced Level)	12–13	2

Source: National Report, 2004, Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka pp. 1– 3.

1.1. Advanced Level Education Structure in Sri Lanka

The Advanced Level (A-Level), education in Sri Lanka leads to preparing students for a very competitive examination at the end of two years. GCE/ AL qualification is conducted by the Department of Examinations of the Ministry of Education, whiuch is similar to the British Advanced Level. It is usually taken by students at the end of the final two years of Collegiate level (Grades 12 & 13). A student has three attempts. A student can face the examination as an external candidate also. GCE/ AL serves as an entrance qualification to the Sri Lankan government universities, practicing free education. Those failing to get university admission can either enter vocational technical schools or be employed in companies or in government departments as apprentice or trainees. Examinations are held in the mediums of Sinhala, Tamil and English, and diversify over 4 major fields of study, namely:
1. Physical Science Stream (Combined mathematics, Physics and Chemistry)
2. Biological Science Stream (Biology (Botany and Zoology), Physics and Chemistry)
3. Commerce and Accounting Stream, and 4. Arts Stream

In each stream, students should face 3 subjects. Additionally there would be a General English test and a Common General test. Although the result of the General English test is not taken into account for the University Entrance selection criteria, students are expected to obtain a pass mark for the Common General test (Wikipedia, 2012).

2. CONSTRUCT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The epistemology of the Emotional Intelligence (EI) still continues to emerge. Peter Salovey and John Mayer, who first coined the term in 1990, defined emotional intelligence as an individual's ability to understand emotions of one's own and others' in a manner that allows

him or her to monitor them, discriminate among different emotions, and use this information effectively in shaping one's behaviour. Later, in 1997 Mayer and Salovey defined that EI involve 'the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion, the ability to access and/or 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'. In an ultra competitive world Intellectual Intelligence (IQ) is now regarded only as a 'threshold requirement' for success. Jensen et al, (2007) sums up this: 'It can then be argued that, if IQ is held constant, EI abilities will be helpful in distinguishing leaders that are more effective'. This is also in unison with Fred Fielder's 'contingency model of leadership effectiveness' (Luthans, 2011). Emotional intelligence construct has received attention in applied and academic contexts signifying its importance in an employee's ability to contribute to an organization's success. Construct of EI has been described as a competency or 'ability to perceive and accurately express emotion to facilitate thought, to understand emotions, and to manage emotions for emotional growth' (Brackett, Mayer, and Warner, 2004). Abilities of EI are found to be indispensable in social interaction. Attempts have been made to develop a detailed conceptualization of emotional intelligence, which divides EI into two sets of competencies: viz., personal and social. Personal competences are divided into the domains of self awareness, self regulation and self motivation and social competencies are divided into the two domains of social awareness and social skills. The conceptual work of Goleman (2001), and Boyatzis (1994), and with Smith, and Blaize (1994), have identified the 'emotional competencies' that may be associated with effective leadership.

Research has observed a relationship between EI and academic success, above and beyond measures of cognitive ability and personality. However, EI's ability to predict academic success is generally weaker in comparison to cognitive ability and personality. Emotional Intelligence, has been found to contribute to 'soft skills', which are found to be vital irrespective of whether students seek employment in the public or private sectors or chose to start their own business (Chamorro-Premuzic et. al, 2010). Wagerman and Funder (2007) found that Conscientiousness was able to successfully predict GPA in college seniors above and beyond the more traditional measures associated with academic achievement. Conscientiousness accounted for 37 % of the variance in GPA. Colom et al. (2007) found that sensation seeking and impulsivity (low Conscientiousness) were negatively correlated with academic performance. Sanchez et al. (2001) observed that intelligence alone was not enough for individuals to experience academic success. Emotional Stability and Conscientiousness, has made a significant contribution to an individual's success in an academic environment. Austin, Evans, Goldwater, and Potter (2005) suggested that the ability to successfully adjust to new situations and changes (in academic life) may be related to emotional intelligence.

2.1. Approaches to measure Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is frequently approached through two different models, the *trait* model and the *ability* model (e.g., Bastian, Burns, & Nettelbeck, 2005; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). The *ability* model, as defined by Mayer, Salovey and colleagues, describes a competency or ability to accurately perceive and identify one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others, and to use this knowledge to make informed, socially appropriate and desirable responses. Within the *ability* model, there is also a distinction in approaching EI as a competency, also termed Emotional Competence (EQ). The most known EQ measurement tool is the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI). ESCI is a recent 360-feedback tool that facilitates to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individuals, providing focused information of the competencies they have to improve on for career progression.

ESCI measures 12 competencies organized into four clusters: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management. The most known ability based EI measure is the Mayer, Salovey, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). MSCEIT is a 141 item, performance based measure based on a traditional intelligence model. This focuses on the four areas of EI, as per the definition of Mayer and Salovey (1997) in a hierarchical manner. Therein Perception, appraisal and expression of emotions is the most basic skill, and the Ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth is the most advanced skill. Authors have used the Genos EI Inventory (Genos EI) for the study. Genos EI is the successor to the Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test, and is a self-report measure, designed with items of minimal personality saturation. It focuses upon the EI ability dimensions, and measures them from a typical performance perspective. The Genos EI self-report inventory (comprehensive version) consists of 70 items designed to measure the frequency with which an individual displays emotionally intelligent behaviours across seven dimensions, for individuals of age 18 to 76. Genos EI Inventory items are scored on a five-point Likert scale, and it can produce an inconsistency index score, socially desirable responding scores, a total EI score, and seven subscale scores.

Table 2 : Domains of EI description

Name of the Factor (Sub Construct)	Description
1. Emotional Self-Awareness (ESA)	The skill of perceiving and understanding one's own emotions.
2. Emotional Expression (EE)	The skill of effectively expressing one's own emotions.
3. Emotional Awareness of Others (EAO)	The skill of perceiving and understanding others' emotions.
4. Emotional Reasoning (ER)	The skill of using emotional information in decision-making.
5. Emotional Self-Management (ESM)	The skill of managing one's own emotions.
6. Emotional Management of Others (EMO)	The skill of positively influencing the emotions of others.
7. Emotional Self-Control (ESC)	The skill of effectively controlling one's own strong emotions.

Source: Gignac, Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory; Technical Manual (2nd Ed.), pp. 11–13.

2.2. Scope of the study

Advanced Level examination is widely considered as the most competitive, and one of the most 'stressful' examinations in Sri Lanka. A-Level examination is not only instrumental in pursuing higher education, but also in deciding the future careers of the adolescents. Sri Lankans, especially the rural population, find it difficult to finance the education of their children in private institutes. Adolescents find A-Level examination as the 'last hurdle' for their desired future careers. This study postulates that Higher levels of EI facilitates in managing stressful and competitive situations. The overall objective of this study was to assess the levels of EI displayed by the high school (A-Level) students in Sri Lanka. The specific objectives included assessing of EI sub constructs of students, and analyzing the EI of respondents based on gender, and specific subject streams. This study will also serve as an exploratory study to analyse the impact of EI on the performances of high school students, and adolescents.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and Procedure

Data was gathered by a survey of 90 school students (45 boys, and 45 girls) appearing for the Advanced level examination this year (2012). They were randomly selected from two high schools in Sri Lanka. Respondents consisted of 30 from Science Stream (Biological, and Physical), 30 from Commerce & Accounting Stream, and 30 from Arts Stream. They were in the ages of 18 and 19. Respondents were briefed about the objectives of the study and the confidentiality of their responses was assured. Questionnaires were explained and were identified by code numbers. Respondents were asked to select responses independently.

3.2. Measurement

Genos EI Inventory (comprehensive self assessment version, 2007) was employed to assess the emotional Intelligence of the respondents. The EI construct has been sub divided into seven sub-constructs (factors) through 70 questions. The Maximum score (theoretically) for the construct was 350, and for a sub-construct were 50. The modified (workplace application) version of Genos EI was used to assess the EI of the respondents, factor wise, and in total.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Inventory of respondents EI

Table 3: Gender wise scores obtained by respondents for EI and its sub constructs through the Genos EI

Factor of EI Inventory	Mean		Mode		Skewness	
	Boys	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
1. Emotional Self-Awareness	40.53 (2.83)[a]	40.80 (5.74)[a]	43.00	38.00	-1.08 (1.56)[c]	-1.15 (2.23)[c]
2. Emotional Expression	44.04 (3.04)[a]	40.78 (5.49)[a]	46.00	45.00	-1.96 (4.14)[c]	-0.86 (0.73)[c]
3.Emotional Awareness of others	41.71 (3.44)[a]	39.80 (5.27)[a]	42.00	43.00	-1.78 (4.09)[c]	-0.73 (0.42)[c]
4. Emotional Reasoning	41.6 (4.52)[a]	38.00 (3.41)[a]	43.00[b]	38.00	-2.00 (5.39)[c]	-0.11 (0.78)[c]
5. Emotional Self-Management	38.38 (2.75)[a]	35.63 (5.33)[a]	39.00	33.00	-0.70 (1.03)[c]	-0.54 (0.53)[c]
6.Emotional Management of others	40.20 (3.03)[a]	40.48 (4.39)[a]	40.00[b]	41.00	0.51 (2.87)[c]	-0.28 (-0.45)[c]
7. Emotional Self-Control	37.71 (3.78)[a]	34.48 (7.81)[a]	34.00[b]	35.00[b]	0.54 (-0.31)[c]	-0.92 (0.61)[c]
Total (score) for EI Construct	284.18 (15.22)[a]	269.95 (27.92)[a]	295.00	278.00	- 2.05 (6.20)[c]	-1.03 (1.58)[c]

a – Values that are shown within parenthesis indicate the Standard Deviation of Mean
b – Multiple modes exist, and the smallest value is shown.
c – Values shown within parenthesis indicate the Kurtosis
Source: data of high school students in Sri Lanka.

The scores obtained by the respondents (gender-wise) for their Emotional Intelligence are shown above in Table 3. The total EI score of the high school boys recorded a Mean (M) value of 284.18, and a Standard Deviation (SD) of 15.22. The respective figures for the high school girls were 269.95, and 27.92. The modes for Total EI score of boys, and girls were 295.00 and 278.00 respectively. The EI score suggests that the high school boys have shown a slightly higher level of Emotional Intelligence over the high school girls participated in the study. It was note-worthy that the Mean scores of the last sub construct of EI, Emotional self control has recorded the least value. EI scores had multiple modes and that was an indication that respondents were dispersed into several clusters of EI. The Cronbach's Alpha figure of 88.2 %, indicated a higher level of internal reliability of the responses.

Table 4: Subject stream wise scores of respondents for EI and its sub constructs through Genos EI.

Factor of EI Inventory	Mean			Mode			Skewness		
	SCI	COM	Arts	SCI	COM	Arts	SCI	COM	Arts
1. Emotional Self-Awareness	41.21 (3.83)[a]	41.00 (5.45)[a]	39.79 (3.82)[a]	41.00	43.00	38.00[b]	-0.49 (0.59)[c]	-1.76 (5.75)[c]	-0.88 (0.54)[c]
2. Emotional Expression	42.32 (4.70)[a]	42.89 (4.38)[a]	42.31 (4.95)[a]	46.00	46.00	45.00	-1.50 (1.93)[c]	-1.28 (0.78)[c]	-1.62 (4.20)[c]
3.Emotional Awareness (others)	41.89 (3.46)[a]	40.93 (4.42)[a]	39.66 (5.21)[a]	43.00	42.00	41.00	-0.60 (-0.2)[c]	-0.92 (-0.3)[c]	-1.32 (1.82)[c]
4. Emotional Reasoning	40.11 (3.33)[a]	39.21 (5.18)[a]	40.38 (4.56)[a]	38.00[b]	42.00[b]	44.00	-0.24 (-0.6)c	-1.20 (2.01)[c]	-0.46 (-0.5)[c]
5. Emotional Self-Management.	37.68 (4.12)[a]	37.14 (4.15)[a]	36.45 (4.84)[a]	39.00[b]	37.00	39.00	-0.86 (0.11)[c]	-0.72 (0.50)[c]	-1.37 (3.75)[c]
6.Emotional Mgt of others	40.86 (3.27)[a]	40.54 (4.38)[a]	39.62 (3.40)[a]	41.00	40.00	40.00[b]	-0.07 (-0.3)[c]	0.52 (-0.3)[c]	-1.21 (1.74)[c]
7. Emotional Self-Control	37.00 (5.47)[a]	36.50 (6.19)[a]	35.10 (6.89)[a]	38.00[b]	31.00[b]	34.00	-1.16 (1.51)[c]	-1.45 (4.29)[c]	-1.13 (2.65)[c]
Total (score) for EI Construct	281.1 (16.8)[a]	278.2 (26.9)[a]	273.3 (24.5)[a]	295.0	288.0	285.0	-1.14 (0.84)[c]	-1.19 (0.68)[c]	-2.14 (6.75)c

a – Values that are shown within parenthesis indicate the Standard Deviation of Mean
b – Multiple modes exist, and the smallest value is shown.
c – Values shown within parenthesis indicate the Kurtosis
Source: data of high school students in Sri Lanka.

EI of the respondents were assessed based on the subject streams chosen by them. Respondents based on the Science subject stream (SCI) recorded the highest level of EI with a M value of 281.10 and a SD of 16.77 (Refer table 4). Commerce subject stream (COM) based students and Arts stream based students recorded respective values of 278.21 (26.97), and 273.31 (24.48). The Mode values obtained by them also indicated a similar value. This suggested that Science stream based high school students possessed a relatively higher level of EI in comparison to the other students focussed on Commerce and Arts based streams. Respondents have indicated the highest EI values for the sub construct of Emotional Expression, and the lowest values for Emotional Self Control sub construct.

4.2. Scores for the Domains of EI

The highest possible Mean value for each sub construct of EI was 50.00.Respondents have obtained an overall M value of 39.58, with boys recording a M value of 40.60, and girls having a M value of 38.56.

Emotional Self-Awareness
Emotional Self-Awareness (Mean values of 40.53, and 40.80) of boys and girls indicated a relative high frequency of consciously identifying their emotions (and become aware of the impact on their behavior) at work. This indicated that high school students (respondents) were quite aware of their emotions, in this fairly volatile phase of adolescence. Arts subjects stream based students recorded the lowest M value of 39.79 for ESA.

Emotional Expression
This measures the relative frequency with which an individual expresses their emotions in an appropriate way at work. High M values of 44.04 (boys), and 40.78 (girls) recorded by the respondents indicated frequent demonstrations of effective emotional expressions. Mean values suggest that high school boys have been more expressive (than girls) in emotions such as feelings of happiness, frustration, as well as feedback to colleagues. The noticeable range between the minimum and maximum EI scores indicated the high levels of fluctuating emotional expressions of high school students.

Emotional Awareness of Others
Mean values of 41.71 (boys), and 39.80 (girls) indicated a frequent and accurate identification of the emotions of colleagues, as well as their causes by the respondents. This indicates the preference among high school adolescents in sharing their emotions with colleagues. The range between the Minimum and Maximum EI scores argue for the fluctuating emotional stability among high school students. Sciencestream based students recorded the highest M value of 41.89 indicating a superior awareness of others emotions.

Emotional Reasoning
ER measures the relative frequency with which an individual incorporates emotionally relevant information in the process of decision making. Respondents have recorded Mean values of 41.60 (boys) and 38.00 (girls) for ER, suggesting boys were more stable in reasoning and decisions in comparison to girls. Commerce subjects stream based students recorded the lowest M vale of 39.21 in this regard. The higher range of Mean values of respondents indicate the high volatility of the reasoning ability of high school students related to their emotional encounters in competitive academic environments.

Emotional Self-Management
This measures the relative frequency with which an individual manages their own emotions at studies (work). ESM of respondents recorded a Mean values of 38.38 (boys) and 35.63 (girls). This was supportive of the proposition that the high school boys were relatively comfortable in managing their own emotions, in comparison to girls. However the overall M values suggest the instability of high school students in managing emotions. Arts stream based students recorded the lowest m value (36.45) in this respect.

Emotional Management of Others
This measures the relative frequency of an individual manages the emotions of others at work, and engagement in the creation of emotionally positive work environments for others, as well

as effectively helping colleagues resolve issues that may be affecting their performance adversely (Gignac, 2010). The mean vlaues of 40.20 (boys) and 40.48 (girls) indicated a relatively high efficiency among the respondents in managing the emotions of their colleagues. Science stream based respondents recorded the highest M value of 40.86.

Emotional Self-Control
Emotional Self-Control measures the relative frequency with which an individual controls their strong emotions appropriately at work (in school). High scores indicate a frequently demonstrated capacity to remain focused when anxious or disappointed at work, as well as the demonstrated ability to not loose one's temper (Gignac, 2010). Respondents had Mean values of 37.71 (boys) and 34.48 (girls). This meant that the highy school students (respondents) were not in control of them in facing strong emotions. Girls seemed the more vulnerable group. The competitiveness of their academic environments, and the volatility of feelings of adolescence would have also contributed to this situation. Arts stream based students had the lowest M value (of 35.10) and the Science stream students had the higest M value (of 37.00).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Findings indicate the varying levels of emotional instability among the high school adolescents of Sri Lanka. Further, the EI scores for the seven sub-constructs of the Inventory confirmed the comparative volatility of emotions among the respondents. Overall Mean values indicated a superior level of EI among boys, in comparison to girls. Similarly, the Science subject stream based students possessed a slightly superior level of EI in comparison to Commerce, and Arts subject stream based students. Boys recorded higher scores for the EI sub-constructs associated with the Emotional expressions, Self awareness, Emotional awareness of others, and Emotional reasoning. Girls recorded higher scores for Self awareness, Emotional expressions, and emotional management of others (colleagues). They have scored lower scores for the EI sub-constructs that were associated in dealing with own emotions, viz: Emotional self control, and Emotional self management. High school adolescents have found it difficult to manage their emotional situations. This emphasizes the necessity of providing counselling opportunities to high school students. Added focus on empathising the high school adolescents by parents and teachers will prove rewarding. Sri Lankan high school students face lot of emotional challenge in an ultra competitive academic environment. The focus on education for career (and life's) success, adolescence, and the importance attached to the Advanced Level examination increase the challenge. Research finding highlight the importance of focussing on the emotional stability of high school students to facilitate the development of productive citizens in Sri Lanka.

5.1. Further research

This research will serve as an exploratory study to focus further on the academic progress of Sri Lankan high school students. A study with a larger sample of respondents, across different demographic clusters could enhance the findings. Analysis of the relationship between EI and academic performances of high school students will enrich future educational reforms.

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