

# Enhancing the Employability of High School Graduates: Impact of Emotional Intelligence

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*Abstract:* - Employability is referred to as the relative potential of an individual to obtain and retain suitable employment in the labour market. Success in higher education is an effective way of enhancing the employability of youth. Competitiveness of examinations has added in to the challenges and aspirations of youth. The objective of the study was to examine the impact of high school students' emotional intelligence (EI) for their Training (study) approaches and employability potential. Eighty five high school (Advanced Level) students (40 girls, and 45 boys) were randomly selected from two high schools in Sri Lanka. They were preparing in three different subject streams for the university entrance examination. Emotional intelligence of the respondents was measured through Genos EI Inventory. Respondents' training (study) approaches were assessed through the 'revised two-factor Study Process Questionnaire' of Biggs et.al. SPSS computer software was employed for descriptive and inferential analysis of data. The employability potential of the students was assessed based on their academic performances. Emotional intelligence, and the Training (study) approaches (motives, and strategies) used by the respondents were assessed. Relationships were sought with students' employability potential (academic performances). High school girls revealed deeper training (study) approaches and their academic performances were superior to the boys. There was no significant impact of EI level to the training (study) process behavior of the respondents, and to their employability potential (academic performances). However, findings revealed a positive relationship between the Emotional Self Control and Employability potential (Academic performances) of high school students. This warrants further analysis, especially in a cultural context. It implies a competitive advantage (employability potential) for students with a better control of self emotions. This has the potential to generate a practical sense in academic and corporate environments alike. Further research is recommended on varying socio-cultural, and demographic segments.

*Key-Words:* - Emotional Intelligence, Employability Potential, High School Students, Study Process

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Emotional Intelligence

Salovey and Mayer[1] defined emotional intelligence (EI) 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'. They [1] 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'. Studies reveal a relationship between EI and academic success, above and beyond measures of cognitive ability and

personality. EI contributes to 'soft skills', which are vital irrespective of whether students seek employment in the public or private sectors or chose to start own business [2].

### 1.2 Education and Learning Styles

Bowles and Gintis [3] viewed education as a form of replication of work to produce future employees. Some of those efforts intended to promote the employability of students' tends to be misguided. Poropot [4] elaborated: 'if education is to fulfill its role in preparing students for work then employability should be integrated into normal educational practice, rather than added to it'. A study conducted by Whitmire [5] in 36 universities and colleges in United States on the usage of library by undergraduates found that a higher usage of

academic library was shown by the students, who indicated active engagement in study activities and faculty interactions. However, the study had not revealed a strong relationship between the students' usage of library and academic performances. Poropot [4] expressed the differences between the assessment of academic performances and workplace performances could diffuse the focus on employability through education. It is pertinent to discuss 'Teaching' and the role of teachers' in this respect. Schmulian and Coetzee [6] have viewed teaching style as follows; 'Lecturers may consider the appropriateness of their style of pedagogy given the outcomes of the study and whether they are adding value in the classroom'. They [6] have indicated that those parties with a vested interest in a student's academic performance, viz. parents, sponsors, university, professional bodies etc., will be interested in verifying the 'possible value addition by a student's class attendance'. Marburger [7] expressed the value of guidance provided by a lecturer in facilitating the critical thought process, such as the improved line of students' thinking, generation of class notes etc.

### 1.3 Employability Potential

Employability is generally referred to as the minimum generic skill levels or competencies needed by school leavers and graduates to enter the labour market. Many definitions have suggested that individual characteristics and behaviours determine the employability of an individual. Hall [8] has mentioned the individual's attitude towards learning as a key factor in maintaining employability. Researchers [9, 10] are of the view that there has been a world-wide push, at a tertiary educational level, to closely align the higher education with the work skills required by employers through inclusion of a range of 'graduate attributes' into curricula. Clarke [11] has summarized it as follows; 'At an individual level employability can be defined in terms of skills and abilities, attitudes and behaviours. Further he [11] adds 'As a current state, a process or a future outcome, an individual characteristic made up of the sum of an individual's job related skills, or as a reflection of the individual's position within the labour market'. Suci et al. [12] provided empirical evidence to suggest that well knowledgeable and skilled employees act as a 'direct source of innovation' for organizations. Evidences are weak to suggest a strong relationship between the EI and academic performances of respondents [13]. Research [14] found that Conscientiousness can be successfully

used to predict GPA in college seniors. Conscientiousness had accounted for 37% of the variance in GPA. It [15] was found that sensation seeking and impulsivity were negatively correlated to the Academic performance. Sanchez et al. [16] observed that Emotional stability and Conscientiousness, have positively contributed to high levels of knowledge and skills of individuals.

### 1.4 Study Process

Among the many theories, it has been common understanding that studying is a process, involving steps. The 'students approaches to learning' (SAL) theory [17, 18] is a meta-theory conceptualizing both teaching and learning. The '3P' model of teaching and learning [19] consists of three levels, viz. a Presage, Process, and a Product. Presage level describes the individual differences within a given teaching context, focused on 'Student factors' and the 'Teaching Context'. Process signifies the handling of specific tasks, based on 'learning focused activities'. Product level describes the differences of teaching contexts from each other. 'The heart of the teaching/ learning system is at the process level, where the learning related activity produces or does not produce the desired outcomes' [19]. In a study environment the roles of the teacher and the student are vital for effectiveness. Researchers suggest that the involvement (and the output) of the student is more important than the teachers role. Significance of the study approaches is focused. Biggs [20] elaborates as follows on Study approaches: 'A generic way of describing 'what the student does' is precisely in terms of their ongoing approaches to learning'. Biggs [20] sums up the argument; 'A student who typically picks out the likely items for assessment and rote learns them, finds that strategy won't work under portfolio assessment, so goes deep'. Teacher can make 'a crucial impact' in forming a community of learners through discourse [21]. A study [22] has suggested that application of an integrative model of curricular innovations enhances the efficiency of teaching in language studies. Jayawardena, and Kuruppuge [23] have found a positive relationship between the surface study approach and academic performances of high school girls.

### 1.5 Scope of the study

There is a growing concern over the employability and career development of youth. It is timely to refocus the grooming of youth to enhance their employability potential from the high school stage.

It can be identified as their first serious training (study) effort to enhance their employability potential. The study focuses on it with specific reference to the impact of Emotional Intelligence. This posits the research question: Is there a relationship between the EI level and training approaches (study process) of students? Overall objective of the study was to examine the relationship of EI of Sri Lankan high school students' with training (study) approaches and employability potential (academic success). Specific objectives of the study were to assess and analyze the impact of emotional intelligence to training (study) approaches (motives, and strategies), and employability potential (academic performances) of high school students. By conducting the study in Sri Lanka, an attempt is made to extend the theory to a culture that is more collectivist in nature than that of the west. Herein the Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory [24] adds another dimension to the findings. Study adds vitality to educational systems. Conceptual framework of the study is shown by Figure 1. Study consisted of an independent variable (e.g. EI of respondents), three intervening variables (e.g. Study Approach, Study Motive, and Study Strategy) and the Dependant variable, i.e. Academic Performance. The three intervening variables were sub-divided into two levels; viz.: Surface, and Deep. Accordingly, the study has posited two main research hypotheses. They are as follows:

Employability potential (Academic Performances) of High School Students.

H2: There is a positive relationship between EI and Training (Study) Approaches of High School Students.

### 1.6 High School Education in Sri Lanka

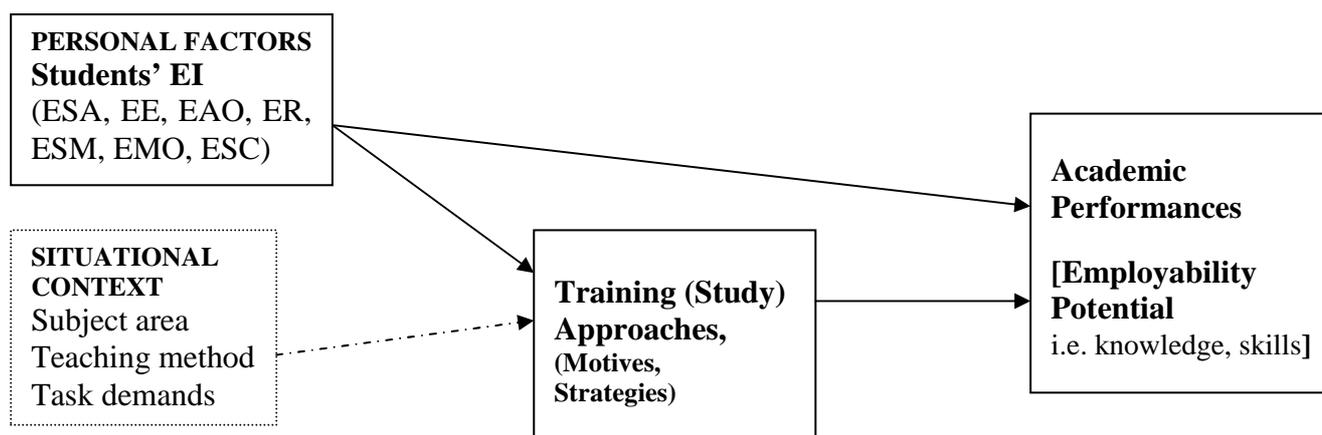
Sri Lankan education system derives from the British educational system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Schools consist of Primary Schools, Lower Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools. In 1938 the education in government schools was made free of charge due to the Universal Franchise granted in 1931. Primary education lasts five years. After that Junior Secondary education lasts for six years. Senior Secondary education is called as the G.C.E. Advanced level (A/L). It lasts for two years. General Certificate of Education (GCE/ AL) examination is conducted by the Department of Examinations of Sri Lanka (which is similar to the British A/L). A/L is a highly competitive examination to selection to state universities. It diversifies over 4 major fields of study, namely: 1.) Physical Science Stream, 2.) Biological Science Stream, 3.) Commerce and Accounting Stream, and 4.) Arts Stream. In each stream, students should face 3 subjects [25]. High school education is a must to secure admission to a Sri Lankan state university, and to pursue a gainful career in the public or private sector.

H1: There is a positive relationship between EI and

#### Presage

#### Process

#### Product



Source: A modified version of study processes using the Biggs's general model (British Journal of Educational Psychology, The British Psychological Society, 1985) [19]

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of the study

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Operationalisation of the Study

Study was conducted among 85 high school students (45 boys, and 40 girls) randomly selected from two high schools in Sri Lanka. Respondents were preparing to face the A/L examination from three major subject streams, namely; Science, Commerce, and Arts in August, 2012. Genos EI Inventory was employed to assess the EI level of the respondents. Revised-SPQ-2F instrument was employed to assess their Study (Training) Process. Constructs were selected based on their merit and simplicity. Respondents' academic performances (employability potential) was measured from their performances at 2011 December examination. Questionnaires were translated into Sinhala language, and modified after pre-testing to enhance clarity. Students were briefed of the purpose of research and their anonymity and confidentiality of

responses was assured. SPSS software was used for descriptive and inferential data analysis. Regression and Correlation analysis were conducted to test major relationships.

### 2.2 Research Instruments

Genos EI Inventory focuses upon the EI ability dimensions, and measures them from a performance perspective. Genos EI [26] self-report inventory (comprehensive version) consists of 70 items designed to measure the frequency with which an individual displays emotionally intelligent behaviours. Genos EI Inventory items are scored on a five-point Likert scale. The Study Process Questionnaire [18] has focused on three dimensions of learning (training): viz. Surface, Deep, and Achieving. Each 'study (training) approach' has a specific 'motive', and an underlying 'strategy'.

Table 1 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 Mgt 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.

The revised two-factor SPQ (Revised-SPQ-2F) is an established measure [19] focused on 'surface', and 'deep' study (training) approaches. The two main factors (e.g. deep and surface) have been used to distinguish the study (training) approach. Further, the approach includes the motive, and strategy sub components.

Table 2 Study Approaches of respondents

Parameter	Surface Approach		Deep Approach	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Mean (M)	31.64	28.68	33.02	31.00
Std. Dev.	5.68	7.36	5.68	6.13

Source: Author's (Survey data of Sri Lankan high school students)

## 3. Findings

Majority of the respondents was 18 years old.

### 3.1 Study (Training) process of respondents

Training approaches of high school students were assessed based on their perceptions of self intent. Respondents expressed the existing levels and execution of their study (training) approaches, namely; Study Approach (SA), Study Motive (SM), and Study Strategy (SS), using the Revised-SPQ-2F instrument.

Respondents have recorded an overall Mean (M) value of 30.18 for Surface SA. They have recorded 32.02 for Deep SA. As depicted in Table 2, Boys have recorded higher mean values for SA (31.64), and DA (33.02), which were higher than the girls. However, in considering the net value of Deep SA over Surface SA, high school girls (2.32) were relatively more inclined to a deeper study approach (over boys' 1.38).

Table 3 Study Motives of respondents

Parameter	Surface Motive		Deep Motive	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Mean (M)	13.44	12.73	15.71	15.52
Std. Dev.	3.19	4.03	2.46	4.17

Source: Author’s (Survey data of Sri Lankan high school students)

Study motives of the respondents were sub divided as surface study motive (SSM), and deep study motive (DSM). Respondents indicated overall mean values of 13.09 (SSM), and 15.62 (DSM) respectively. The respective values for boys and girls are depicted in Table 3. Girls have shown a slightly higher (DSM-SSM) net value of 2.79 compared to boys (+2.27), indicating deeper study motives. This was in agreement with the findings depicted in Table 2.

Study Strategies employed by the respondents were measured. They were sub divided as surface study strategy (SSS), and deep study strategy (DSS).

Table 4 Study Strategies of respondents

Parameter	Surface Strategy		Deep Strategy	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Mean (M)	18.20	15.95	17.31	15.48
Std. Dev.	3.33	4.40	3.04	3.60

Source: Author’s (Survey data of Sri Lankan high school students)

Respondents indicated overall mean values of 17.09 for SSS and 16.40 for DSS. The respective values for boys and girls are depicted in Table 4. Respondents (both of girls and boys) have recorded negative values for DSS over SSS. This suggested a higher (dependence) in surface study strategies, despite harbouring a more liking towards deeper study motives, and study approaches. Girls have again indicated a superior net value (DSS-SSS) of (-0.47) over boys (-0.89) conforming to the trend depicted in Tables 2, and 3.

### 3.2 Emotional Intelligence of respondents

Emotional Intelligence of the respondents was measured using the Genos EI inventory. Respondents were allocated a score based on their responses to identified events, and contexts. EI score was identified in seven sub constructs and in total as well. Respondents’ total EI score based on their

gender was used for further analysis with other study variables. It was note-worthy that the EI score of its last sub construct, i.e. Emotional Self Control has recorded the least value. EI scores had multiple modes, indicating the respondents’ dispersion into several clusters.

Table 5 Respondents’ Emotional Intelligence

Construct	Boys		Girls	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
ESA	40.53	2.83	40.80	5.74
EE	44.04	3.04	40.78	5.49
EAO	41.71	3.44	39.80	5.27
ER	41.60	4.52	38.00	3.41
ESM	38.38	2.75	35.63	5.33
EMO	40.20	3.03	40.48	4.39
ESC	37.71	3.78	34.48	7.81
Total	284.18	15.22	269.95	27.92

Source: Author’s (Survey data of Sri Lankan high school students)

Respondents’ EI scores are shown in Table 5. Boys have recorded a higher EI score than girls. EI score suggests that boys demonstrate a slightly higher level of EI over the girls. The Cronbach’s Alpha figure of 88.2% indicated a higher level of internal reliability. These EI scores are slightly higher than the normative values of Genos EI [26], suggesting that Sri Lankan high school students possessing higher EI level. It is note-worthy that the lowest values scored by the respondents are for Emotional Self Management (ESM) and Emotional Self Control (ESC). This is typical especially for the age category of respondents.

Table 6 Examination marks of respondents

Parameter	Marks obtained	
Category	Boys	Girls
Mean (M)	58.80	64.34
Std. Dev.	9.39	11.12

Source: Author’s (Survey data of Sri Lankan high school students)

### 3.3 Academic Performances of Respondents

Employability potential (Academic performances) of respondents were assessed based on their marks obtained at the end of year examination in December, 2011. Students have faced three subjects from their major stream; viz.: Science (30), Commerce (28), and Arts (27). Students’ marks of

the three subjects were averaged and depicted (as a %) in Table 6. Girls have scored higher values 64.34 (M), 11.12 (SD) than boys 58.80 (M), 9.39 (SD). Girls have a superior performance of examination marks (academic performances) over boys.

### 3.4 Significant Relationships

Study had two main research hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive relationship between EI and Employability potential (Academic Performances) of High School Students.

There was no significant relationship between the overall EI construct and Academic performances (Employability Potential) of respondents. However, there was a positive relationship between ESC and Academic Performances of boys, which could be summarized by the accompanying equation. Academic Performances of boys = 25.19 + 0.90 \* Emotional Self Control. This is an important finding in the context of enhancing the employability potential of youth. The R<sup>2</sup> of 0.13 indicated that ESC had contributed only to 13% of the variation in boys' Academic Performances. This could prove a crucial factor in a competitive environment. The F value of 6.14, and a t value of 2.52 verified the model, and significance at a 95% confidence interval. Durbin-Watson test statistic of 2.30 indicated of the generalisability of the model.

H2: There is a positive relationship between EI and Training (Study) Approaches of High School Students.

Relationships were sought between the Emotional Intelligence of respondents and their Study (Training) Approaches. Further analyses were conducted between the EI and sub dimensions of study Approaches; namely: a.) Study Motive, and b.) Study Strategy. Logistic regression analysis was employed as the Study (Training) Approaches, and each of it's dimensions were categorized in to two levels; i.e. Surface and Deep. The accompanying equation was:

$$f(EI) = 1/(1+e^{-(a_0+a_1x)}) \tag{1}$$

EI denotes Emotional Intelligence. Fig. 2 indicates the graph analyzing the relationship between Study (Training) Approach (Y axis) and EI (X axis) of respondents. Deep and Surface levels of study (Training) approach were identified by codes of 1, and 0 respectively. Here, graph does not show any relationship (pattern) between EI and Study

(Training) Approaches. Results did not reveal any notable influence of respondents' EI on their Study (Training) Approach. It could be expressed by the equation:

$$f(EI) = 1/(1+e^{-0.744+0.00139EI}) \tag{2}$$

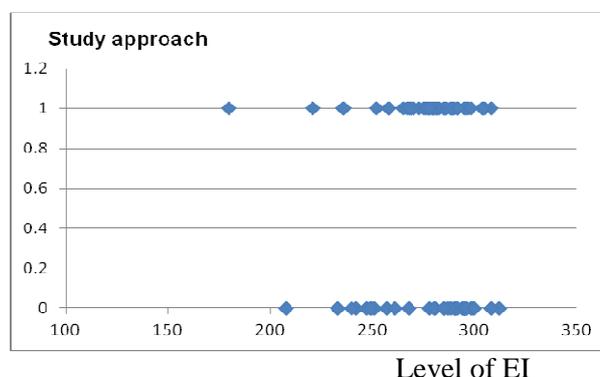
Analysis between the EI level of respondents and study (Training) motive, and study (Training) strategy (levels) had similar results.

Emotional Intelligence and Study (Training) Motives:

$$f(EI) = 1/(1+e^{-0.431+0.00432EI}) \tag{3}$$

Emotional Intelligence and Study (Training) Strategies:

$$f(EI) = 1/(1+e^{-2.199+0.00767EI}) \tag{4}$$



Source: Author's (Survey data of Sri Lankan high school students)

Fig. 2 Study Approach and EI regression plot

Table 7 Correlation Matrix for Study (Training) Process Variables

	DSA	SSA	DSM	SSM	DSS	SSS
DSA	1.00	N.A.	0.660 (0.907)	N.A.	0.796 (0.873)	N.A.
SSA	N.A.	1.00	N.A.	0.865 (0.868)	N.A.	0.877 (0.889)
DSM	0.660 (0.907)	N.A.	1.00	N.A.	N.S (0.586)	N.A.
SSM	N.A.	0.865 (0.868)	N.A.	1.00	N.A.	0.517 (0.544)
DSS	0.796 (0.873)	N.A.	N.S. (0.586)	N.A.	1.00	N.A.
SSS	N.A.	0.877 (0.889)	N.A.	0.517 (0.544)	N.A.	1.00

Source: Author's (Survey data of Sri Lankan high school students)

<sup>1</sup>- Values in parenthesis indicate the correlation coefficients for high school girls

<sup>2</sup>- N.S. indicates Non Significant

<sup>3</sup>- N.A. indicates Not Applicable.

There were no significant relationships between the respondents' Training (Study) Approaches (and sub dimensions) and Employability potential (Academic performances). However, this could be due to the lack of information to the respondents on the evaluation techniques involved in the assessment scheme.

As depicted in Table 7, following correlations among the Study (Training) Approaches, significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed), were noteworthy. Respective Pearson Correlation Coefficients (r) are indicated within parenthesis. Deep study approach and Deep study strategy of boys (0.796), Deep study approach and Deep study motive of boys (0.660), Surface study approach and Surface study strategy of boys (0.877), Surface study approach and Surface study motive of boys (0.865), Surface study motive and Surface study strategy of boys (0.517), Deep study approach and Deep study motive of girls (0.907), Deep study approach and Deep study strategy of girls (0.873), Girls' Deep study motive and Deep study strategy (0.586), Surface study approach and Surface study motive of girls (0.868), Surface study approach and Surface study strategy of girls (0.889), and Surface study strategy of girls with surface study motive (0.544). The absence of a significant correlation between the boys' Deep study (Training) motive and Deep study (Training) strategy was note-worthy. This could have been a reason to the inferior employability potential (Academic Performances) they have indicated, in comparison to the girls.

## 4 Conclusion

Findings of the study have not supported the research question in the affirmative. They revealed a positive relationship between the Emotional Self Control and Academic (examination) performances of Sri Lankan high school boys. This implies that a higher level of Emotional Self Control contributes to enhance the employability potential of men (boys). It implies a competitive advantage for students having a better control of their emotions. Above relationship could generate practical sense in academic and corporate environments alike. Success in enhancing the employability potential can effectively get proliferated into career development. There was no significant relationship between the EI level of respondents and their Training (study) approaches. Herein it would be premature to comment on the above relationship, and their choice of 'Training (Study) Process' without details of assessment techniques employed.

This could also reason out the absence of a significant relationship between the study (Training) approaches and academic performances (employability potential) of students. Possession of deeper Training (Study) approaches, and securing of superior academic performances (employability potential) by girls is an indication that warrants further analysis. This could also depend on the nature, and demands of subject streams/syllabuses, and evaluation schemes discussed in the Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning [27].

## Limitations and Further Research

This study was limited to two groups of high school students. Research among larger samples of high school students will validate the generalization of the findings. Further research on varying socio-cultural contexts, focused on demographic segments will add vitality to educational systems. There may also be other major factors to secure employment opportunities, other than the employability potential.

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