

Student Perceptions of the Role of Emotional Intelligence in College Success: A Phenomenological Study

Juan F. Ramirez, Arvind Gudi, Thomas Griffin, Ed Sherbert

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Although there is an emerging body of literature demonstrating a relationship between Emotional Intelligence and academic success (i.e., GPA) and much speculation as to how Emotional Intelligence impacts academic performance, there are no studies to date, which examine students' experiences of this phenomenon in-depth. There is a need to understand the experience of students with regard to how Emotional Intelligence impacts academic achievement from the students' perspective.

This dissertation presents a qualitative study based on the perceptions and lived experiences of eight undergraduate business students with respect to emotional intelligence and how it impacts perceived success. If Emotional Intelligence contributes to improved academic achievement, a greater understanding of the relationship between EI and student success, particularly within the realms of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management would benefit universities in both admissions decisions and interventions to improve student success, thereby increasing overall student retention.

The knowledge gained from this research contributes to existing literature regarding how EI impacts students' perceived success in an undergraduate business program. The goal of this research project was to gather rich descriptions and a depth of understanding of the students' experiences of EI as it relates to perceived success. The most prevalent themes identified by respondents were relationship management, self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness. The eight students who participated in this study emphasized and recognized that EI was an important factor in their decision-making process for academic success. Results of this research indicated that there was a strong, positive connection between EI and academic success and that the development of EI was influenced by identifiable factors. Emotions play a key role in decision making, and this research reinforced the awareness that emotional stability and EI are crucial components for academic success.

I. Introduction

Recently the focus of research in the area of emotional intelligence (EI) has shifted from leadership and workplace performance to include its ability to predict student outcomes. Nelson and Low (1999) posited that with more than 25 years of investigation they "have documented the importance and value of emotional and personal skills in high achievement, retention, career excellence, and responsive personal leadership" (p. 21). Robbins, Lauer, Le, Davis, Langley, and Carlston (2004) stated that both academic and nonacademic factors have some bearing on a student's decision on whether to remain or leave school. Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth (2004) affirmed that some nonacademic factors such as academic self-confidence, social support, and social involvement could positively affect student retention.

As noted by Low, Lomax, Jackson, and Nelson (2004) the incorporation of EI in student success programs and instructional practices was a key component to enlightening education and aiding students and faculty members in achieving superior levels of success and individual well-being. Developing EI competencies and abilities are vital to designing and preserving a productive and vigorous college climate.

A number of factors have traditionally been used to predict the future college success of students and these include past performance, grade point average (GPA), tests of intellectual abilities (IQ), and tests of academic achievement (e.g., American College Testing [ACT]; Scholastics Assessment Test [SAT]; Drago, 2004). However, recent investigation has shown a positive correlation between EI and academic achievement, pointing to a need to further understand EI in educational settings, particularly in relation to its influence on student success. EI may be a meaningful predictor of success in higher education and "awareness is growing of the role EI plays in academic achievement" (Kamarinos, 2002, p. 92). The problem addressed by this study was the need to understand the experience of students with regard to how EI impacts student success, if at all, from the students' perspective.

EI can be described as the capacity to recognize and convey emotions, to utilize emotions to enable thinking, to comprehend and infer with emotions, and to handle emotions efficiently within oneself and in

interactions with others (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). EI as a concept began as an observation that some people seem to know how to better utilize their emotions than others in a range of areas (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Goleman (1998) indicated that EI was one of the most significant influences in career performance, individual adaptation, and relationships, and advocated EI as the “best predictor of success in life” (p. 31).

The notion that higher EI may provide an advantage in regard to personal and professional achievement has initiated much enthusiasm among academics, leaders, business managers, business consultants, and the general public. The works of Gardner (1993), Goleman (1995), Salovey and Mayer (1990), and Seligman (1990) have stressed the significance of EI in individual, career, and academic achievement. According to Goleman (1995) and Salovey and Mayer (1990), widespread opinion and organizations’ testimonials point to the idea that EI positively impacts individual performance. Supporters assert that enhancing EI can do everything from enhancing the overall quality of work life to improving career success (Lam & Kirby, 2002). According to Rode et al. (2007), it is foreseeable that EI is correlated to academic performance in two ways. First, academic performance comprises countless ambiguities, which have been shown to lead to feelings of stress (Astin, 1993; Jex, 1998). Students are obligated to accomplish several projects, adapt to the diverse teaching styles and expectations of professors, work individually to achieve goals, and cope with conflicting academic and nonacademic agendas and programs. Moreover, some aspects of academic work (e.g., taking exams) may be experienced as extremely stressful. A great part of academic performance is self-directed, demanding high levels of self-management (Rode et al., 2007). Rode et al. (2007) indicated that people with a high degree of EI are capable to manage positive emotions to sustain the energy required for high levels of performance over extended periods of time and to channel negative emotions into constructive activities. Thus, the authors rationalized that students possessing high EI would perform better academically.

Students’ noncognitive abilities, such as EI, have been correlated with academic success as well as professional performance (Bar-On et al., 2007; Goleman, 2006; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004) and research conducted by Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, and Majeski (2004) suggested that numerous components of EI were found to also be predictors of academic success. According to Goleman (2006), “Our schools and our culture fixate on academic abilities, ignoring emotional intelligence that also matters immensely for our personal destiny” (p. 36). Caruso and Salovey (2004) asserted “the key idea behind emotional intelligence is that our emotions, in effect, make us smarter” (p. 25). In order to become successful in school, as well as in future professional careers, students should be assisted in developing EI skills by means of coaching and educational platforms (Abraham, 2006; Bergman, 2006; Chia, 2005; Codier, 2006; Dhiman, 2008; Justice & Espinoza, 2007; Potter, 2005; Van Rooy, Alonso, & Viswesvaran, 2005). Lankisch (2007) discovered that higher education students who successfully fulfilled an emotion management curriculum to some extent improved EI scores.

A study conducted by Petrides, Frederickson, and Furnham (2004) demonstrated that EI moderated the relationship between cognitive ability and academic performance. Given these initial findings, researchers were interested in linking EI characteristics to factors such as student success and retention. Cognitive abilities are imparted first importance when assessing candidates for colleges and universities; nonetheless, if EI contributes to effective performance within academic programs, it could possibly be practical to also screen for emotional skills and abilities as a determinant of future academic success (Lewis, 2004). Having the capacity to recognize students possessing low levels of EI could eventually assist academic advisors and admissions counselors to take a more practical approach instead of a sensitive approach in the admissions and advising process as well as in the development of curricula designed to enhance student success. Such an approach may eventually improve retention rates benefiting both the student and the organization. Schutte and Malouff (2002) noted that students who completed a course integrating EI into the curriculum demonstrated a considerably higher retention rate compared to students who did not take the course. Moreover, according to Landau and Meirovich (2001) it would be meaningful to consider if current approaches designed to enhance student success can be supplemented by other unexpected tactics, which make the expansion of emotional skills possible.

According to Goleman (1997), students who developed their EI skills and abilities tended to be more motivated and will strive to seek challenges. Studies in this area indicate both emotional and cognitive processing skills were considered to be comparable in importance when looking at overall school success (Cherniss, 2002; Goleman, 1997) even though many higher education institutions continue to base academic success mostly on GPA and standardized assessments. Parker et al. (2004) stated, “additional research might also want to investigate a broader range of indicators for academic success than just GPA” (p. 170). Although there is an emerging body of literature demonstrating a relationship between EI and academic success (i.e., GPA) and much speculation as to how EI impacts academic performance, there is a need to understand how students experience EI and to what extent, if at all, EI influences students’ success.

A qualitative approach was the appropriate approach for the purpose of this study intended to examine and understand the role EI plays in undergraduate students’ academic experiences, and success in college, if at all. Creswell (2015) defines qualitative research as the

Type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner. (p. 46)

Qualitative research permits the researcher a comprehensive and multifaceted appreciation and consideration of the subject matter while also encouraging individuals to impart their experiences in order to have their opinions heard (Creswell, 2007). The intention is to “seek to capture what people have to say in their own words” (Patton, 1986, p. 22). This researcher conducted a phenomenological approach by way of individual interviews to examine the lived experiences of undergraduate business students.

A greater understanding of the relationship between EI and student success would benefit universities in both admissions decisions and interventions to improve student success, thereby increasing overall student retention. Further, college students will also benefit from a greater understanding of how undergraduate business students experience EI and in what ways, if any, this phenomenon impacts their ability to successfully navigate the college experience.

Emotional Intelligence is the capacity to recognize and convey emotions, to utilize emotions to enable thinking, to comprehend and infer with emotions, and to handle emotions efficiently within oneself and in interactions with others (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). Goleman (1998) pinpointed four components to EI, consisting of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Goleman suggested developing EI based on a model comprising these four main constructs.

Relationship Management. The capability to connect and relate with others and construct encouraging and proactive relationships by developing and inspiring others through collaboration, learning to listen, and communicating unmistakably and persuasively in decision-making and resolving conflicts (Daft, 2011; Goleman, 1998).

Self-Awareness. May perhaps be reflected as the foundation of all further components of EI. It encompasses the capacity for an individual to comprehend and identify his or her own emotions in relation to how they affect their life and work environment (Daft, 2011; Goleman, 1998).

Self-Management. The capacity to organize unsettling, damaging, or fruitless desires and emotions in order to become more effective through credibility, carefulness, and adaptableness (Daft, 2011; Goleman, 1998).

Social Awareness. The ability to exercise empathy and to comprehend others by displaying consideration and carefulness. Those who are socially conscious are also able to comprehend conflicting points of view and interacting competently with different emotions and individuals (Daft, 2011; Goleman, 1998).

II. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the lived experience of EI and its influence, if any, on successful navigation through the college experience for undergraduate business students at a private not-for-profit university in the Southeastern United States. Goleman (1995) theorized that EI abilities such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, are skills that are crucial to success in the workplace. Although there is a body of literature on EI and leadership and EI and job performance, research on EI and academic performance remains relatively limited (Drago, 2004).

III. Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the history, current understanding, and state of the literature on EI, with emphasis placed on the relationship between EI and student success.

Theoretical Models of Emotional Intelligence

Although no single accepted definition exists for EI (Barchard, 2003) the Bar-On model, the Salovey-Mayer model, and the Goleman model are widely recognized as being among the most accepted theoretical frameworks of EI.

Goleman model. Both the Bar-On (1999) and Salovey-Mayer (1997) models served as a foundation for the development of Goleman's model. Goleman (1995) described a historical synopsis of EI and the numerous investigators attempting to research and measure the expression. The source of Goleman's definition comes from Salovey's understanding of Gardner's (1993) work on personal intelligences.

Goleman (1995) defined EI as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships" (p. 317). According to Goleman (1995) EI can be a critical factor in determining whether individuals will be successful with people, in school, and in work.

Goleman (1998) offered a brief outline of his social and emotional competencies. Goleman (1998) pinpointed four components to EI, consisting of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, which are skills he considered crucial to success. Goleman suggested developing EI based on a model comprising these four main components. Goleman et al. (2002) expanded the four components of EI into 18 competencies based on EI competencies early research.

The expanded competencies are as follow:

1. Self-Awareness Domain: Emotional self-awareness, Accurate self-assessment, and Self-confidence.
2. Self-Management Domain: Self-control, Transparency, Adaptability, Achievement, Initiative, and Optimism.

3. Social Awareness Domain: Empathy, Organizational awareness, and Service.
4. Relationship Management Domain: Inspiration, Influence, Developing others, Change catalyst, Conflict management, and Teamwork and Collaboration (Goleman et al., 2002, pp. 254–256).

The three models mentioned may offer some variances on how they measure, recognize, and define the components of EI. However, it is important to mention that the shared relationship among them is the capacity to identify and understand emotions and develop the necessary competencies to respond to those emotions in oneself and others.

IV. Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement

Holt and Jones (2005) noted that some investigations also have discovered a connection between academic success and social talents, so as students contrast in cognitive capability, the importance of EI in academic settings warrants additional investigation. According to Holt and Jones (2005) intellectual capability by itself is not an assurance of academic accomplishment. EI is perceived to be essential in academic environments, and with applicable training in EI, students will not only be effective and prosperous in school but will also develop into well-adjusted persons in society.

Research conducted by Parker et al. (2004) revealed that numerous elements of EI were determined to be predictors of academic achievement. In Parker et al.'s (2004) study, 372 first year university students were asked to complete the Emotional Quotient Inventory short form (EQ-i: Short) at the start of the semester. Data obtained from this inventory at the end of the school year was compared with the academic records of the participating students identifying two diverse levels of academic success: (a) high performing (successful) students that during their first year attained a grade point average (GPA) of 80% or superior, and (b) reasonably low performing students who obtained a GPA of 59% or less during their first year. The outcome of this research uncovered that the high performing students scored better than the low performing group on intrapersonal ability, stress management, and adaptability, considered three out of the four subsets of EI as defined by the EQ-i: Short.

Shahzada, Ghazi, Khan, Khan, and Shah's (2011) research study discovered a noteworthy relationship between academic achievement and EI and suggested that EI be incorporated in the academic curriculum. AbiSamra (2000) also found a positive correlation between EI and academic achievement. Consequently the author petitioned for the addition of EI courses in the school system.

Although some studies have discovered a correlation between academic achievement and EI, the overall findings are mixed. Newsome, Day, and Catano (2000) examined EI, personality, and cognitive ability in relation to academic achievement. EI was evaluated using the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), using both

the total score and five composite factor scores. None of the EQ-i scores (total and composite factor scores) were found to be significantly correlated to academic achievement. Research conducted by O'Connor and Little (2003) measured the relationship between EI and academic achievement in college students, as calculated by grade point average, utilizing both ability-based assessments of EI and self-report. The findings revealed that EI, whether measured as ability or through self-report, was not a significant predictor of academic achievement.

Shipley, Jackson, and Segrest (2010) stated, "certain subfactors of EI are related to academic performance as measured by GPA" (p. 7). Based on research by Shipley et al., business schools should explore supplementing useful and viable courses that would help students perform at a higher level of EI, which can ultimately assist them in improving their future performance and interactions in any organization. Taking into consideration the mixed findings on the relationship between EI and academic performance, the construct justifies further investigation.

V. Emotional Intelligence and College Success

Despite some noted concerns with regard to the legitimacy of EI (Barchard & Christensen, 2007; Krus & Helmstadter, 1987; Livingstone & Day, 2005; Roberts et al., 2001) there appears to be increasing interest in the role of EI in higher education. There is a growing body of literature examining the relationship between EI and academic success in college (Bastian, Burns, & Nettlebeck, 2005; Freudenthaler & Neubauer, 2005; Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001) and a recent rise in dissertations devoted both to EI and college student success (Feldman, 2003; Holt, 2007; Izaguirre, 2008; LaCivita, 2003; Vela, 2004; Walker, 2006; Westphal, 2007).

According to Elias and Weissber (2000), college student success has been traditionally evaluated from various viewpoints including proficiency skills, course completion, and grade point average (GPA). However, these traditional evaluations may not offer a full representation of college students' academic capabilities. Research has demonstrated that students with higher EI scores are likely to perform better academically (Parker, Duffy, Wood, Bond, & Hogan, 2005; Vela, 2004; Walker, 2006).

Many organizations employing recent college graduates stress the significance of "soft skills," and seem considerably less pleased with college graduates' lack of emotional and interpersonal competencies when compared to their analytical and theoretical abilities (Rynes, Trank, Lawson, & Hies, 2003; Shivpuri & Kim, 2004; Whetten & Cameron, 2005). Becoming aware of these inconsistencies makes it worthwhile for higher education institutions to address the subject of improving students' EI competencies to prepare them for post-graduate employment.

The Personal Achievement Skills System (PASS) a self-assessment instrument to measure students' EI abilities has been a significant predictor in retention and success among freshmen at Texas A&M University (Nelson & Pierce, 1998). Nelson and Nelson (2003) posited that PASS is a valuable emotional learning model and noted that "emotional skills as measured by the PASS were significant factors in the achievement and retention of freshmen at Texas A&M University" (p. 6). PASS has also been influential in acknowledging that emotional skills of time management, goal fulfillment, and assertive communication are important components in freshmen academic achievement and retention (Nelson & Nelson, 2003).

Mentoring programs in EI involving student interaction with faculty members have been found to have a positive influence on academic retention and success (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Thile & Matt, 1995). According to Holt and Jones (2005) EI is essential in educational venues, and with proper training, students can find success in college and as well-adjusted members of the community.

Dawda and Hart (2000) concluded that the EQ-i has good reliability and validity with college students. The correlation between EQ-i scores and academic success in college has been explored. While some investigators found no relationship (Newsome et al., 2000) or only insubstantial relationships (O'Connor & Little, 2003) amongst grade point average and EQ-i, Parker and colleagues (Parker et al., 2004) have stated that academic success for first year full-time college students was related with specific subscales. Moreover, a correlation was also found between EQ-i and student retention (Parker et al., 2006).

Mayer and Salovey (1997) posited that particular EI competencies are needed for students to succeed throughout their college life. Specifically, students need to have the capacity to distinguish and recognize their own emotions. Students ought to utilize their emotions to enable confident judgments and performances. Students must be capable to recognize their emotions and the reasons they come into contact with them. Finally, students ought to acquire the capacity to successfully manage their emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

McCabe (2000) posited that 29% of college freshmen are not fully primed in some of the basic competencies needed for academic success. According to Hoyt and Winn (2004) college student retention rates and academic success have been researched from numerous perspectives. Hawkins, Smith, and Catalano (2004), and Hoyt and Winn (2004) emphasized that some characteristics to consider for academic success were how well a student is succeeding throughout the semester and in his/her coursework, and what the college or

university's capabilities are in retaining students from freshman year to graduation. Diverse methodologies have been utilized to gauge the wide-ranging term "academic success" (Crews & Aragon, 2007; DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009; Evenson, 2007; Hawkins et al., 2004; Hoyt & Winn, 2004). According to Brackett and Salovey (2006) researchers continue to explore the correlation between students' capability to succeed in higher education and EI. Liff (2003) concluded that there was a correlation between student college success and EI and proposed that this connection had the possibility to influence academic success. Liff (2003) stated, Elements of social and emotional intelligence – self-awareness and advocacy, self-regulation of mood and behavior, goal setting, self-monitoring, empathy, and social skills merge to impact the quality of student life on campus and may even determine the success or failure of a college experience. (p. 34)

The more competencies of EI embodied in college students would eventually lead to academic success (Liff, 2003). According to Clark, Callister, and Wallace (2003) students can be taught EI competencies in the classroom. Clark et al. further noticed an improvement in EI levels, in students who took a course designed to develop those skills compared to students who did not learn those skills in a similar course.

Qualter, Gardner, and Whiteley (2007) stated that the significance of EI is so decisive that a curriculum needs to be expanded to incorporate emotional skill competencies into educational platforms. Latif (2004) engaged in developing coursework to enhance the components of EI in a management related program as a method to increase the nonbusiness qualities of the real world working life. This does not imply that particular academic abilities are not important, but supports the necessity to teach more holistically. According to Latif (2004) an improvement of EI competencies was recognized through pre and posttesting as part of the curriculum expansion. Goleman et al. (2002) stated,

What would our schools and children be like if education also included those emotional intelligence abilities that foster resonance? For one thing, employers of every kind would have the pleasure of taking into their ranks new generations of leaders-to-be who were already adept at these key work skills. (p. xiii)

According to Goleman et al. (2002), it is hoped that business educators acknowledge the significance of EI in higher education for assisting their graduates in becoming effective leaders. Providing training to students in methods to enhance EI competencies would appear to be a valuable consideration when developing any academic curriculum. EI could be a contributing factor through the implementation of curriculum improvement techniques, student services, and specialized courses that can benefit freshmen student success and retention rates through graduation.

VI. Research Questions

1. What meaning do undergraduate business school students ascribe to EI and to what extent has EI influenced their academic experience, if at all?
2. How do students describe their lived experiences of EI and relevance of EI in day-to-day student life?
3. How do students use their EI, if at all, when dealing with their major academic challenges?
4. To what extent, if at all, do students attribute their successes in an undergraduate business program to EI?

VII. Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the lived experience of EI and its influence, if any, on college success for undergraduate business students at a private not-for-profit university in the Southeastern United States. Data collected in this qualitative research study consisted of one-on-one interviews in order to foster an investigative process that centered on the spoken contribution of the participants as opposed to the numerical illustrations of qualitative research (Creswell, 2015).

Participants

The study participants were eight traditional undergraduate business students. A purposive sampling technique was used in this qualitative research as it allowed the researcher to purposely "select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2015, p. 214). As noted by Bowen (2005), purposive sampling "stresses in-depth investigation" (p. 217).

In IPA the intent is to obtain an equitably homogeneous sample, allowing the researcher to analyze potential convergence and divergence within the sample (Smith et al., 2009). The selection was based on the purpose of the research and the researcher's judgment focusing on particular characteristics of a population which in this research were traditional undergraduate business students who demonstrated "success" in that they have completed their first two years of college and were currently in good academic standing. Based on Kruger (1998), participants were selected with EI knowledge or who "have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" (p. 150).

Inclusion criteria for the study were students in good academic standing and had earned at least 60 credits toward their undergraduate degree in business. All students in the Business School database who completed 60 credits or more were invited by the researcher to participate in the study via email. Permission was obtained from the Center's Dean to recruit potential participants via the undergraduate database.

Procedures

Once interested participants were identified, a follow up in-person interview was scheduled. During this personal meeting this researcher explained the purpose of the study and informed participants of the research, risks/benefits, their rights to confidentiality, and their rights to not participate or to stop participating in the study at any time without any consequences. Glesne (2006) affirmed "though informed consent neither precludes the abuse of research findings, nor creates a symmetrical relationship between researcher and researched, it can contribute to the empowering of research participants" (p. 132). By way of informed consent, prospective study participants were made aware that participation was voluntary, of any aspects of the research that may possibly affect their well-being, and that they could freely choose to end participation at any point in the study (Diener & Crandall, 1978). This researcher ensured that respondents were informed about the important aspects of the proposed interviews and conventions to record the interview dialog. The researcher discussed the recording and transcript process with the participants to ensure confidentiality and privacy. The signed written consent was collected from those participants who chose to participate in the study and a copy was given to them.

Approximately 20 potential participants were recruited for the proposed study. After obtaining the signed consent to take part in the study the researcher administered the Emotional Intelligence Scale. The top eight highest scorers were selected to continue participating in the study. The Emotional Intelligence Scale is a 33-item self-report scale, which is intended to assess the extent to which participants typically recognize, comprehend, connect, and control emotions in themselves and in others (Schutte et al., 1998). According to Schutte et al. (1998) the Emotional Intelligence Scale demonstrated internal consistency of .87 to .90 and test-retest reliability of .78 over two weeks. This instrument has been used in previous studies to predict college grades for first year students (Schutte et al., 1998).

Selected participants received a copy of the interview protocol facilitating the data collection session. The interviews were audio taped via a digital recorder and copied to CDs. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher using earphones to safeguard privacy. All audio recordings were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Transcriptions were saved in the researcher password-protected personal computer. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms only known by the researcher and kept in a file saved into a password-protected personal computer. Arrangements to provide a copy of the interview transcript were established so that each respondent was able to clarify any reported position or finding (i.e. member checking).

Data collection tools. The proposed research was conducted via a one-on-one interview process by asking questions and recording the answers (Creswell, 2015). This technique provided the researcher the opportunity to ask open-ended questions in order to transcribe the data for future analysis. Individual interviews gave each participant the ability to speak more openly, be more expressive, feel more relaxed, and be able to express their views more comfortably (Creswell, 2015). Furthermore, with open-ended questions the study participants could better express their opinions without any perceived bias of the researcher or any previous study results (Creswell, 2015).

A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) was used in this research study so it could serve as a tool to develop some structure to the interviews while gathering detailed comments and information from the participants. "One way to provide more structure than in the completely unstructured, informal conversational interview, while maintaining a relatively high degree of flexibility, is to use the interview guide strategy" (Patton, as cited in Rubin & Babbie, 2001, p. 407). The rationale for a semi-structured interview was to attain descriptions of the lived experience of the interviewee with regard to understanding the meaning of the phenomenon described (Kvale, 2007). The author further stated, with a semi-structured interview "there is openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the specific answers given and the stories told by the subject" (p. 51). Bowen (2005) noted "it also helps readers of the research report judge the quality of the interviewing methods and instruments used" (p. 217). Through the process of interviewing, this researcher investigated each individual's understanding and experience with EI. Glesne (2006) posited that "this research, by design and philosophy, requires the involvement of 'others' as co-learners in this study, and the development of a relationship based on trust and rapport" (p. 37). The interview guide was reviewed by an expert in qualitative research, reviewed for content by a subject matter expert in the area of EI and pilot tested (Creswell, 2013).

Data analysis. The analysis of interview records and summaries were based on an inductive methodology focusing on classifying patterns in the data by way of thematic codes. Patton (1980) affirmed that “inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (p. 306). By employing a qualitative, systematic analysis, interview transcripts were analyzed case by case. The study results were converted into a narrative account where the researcher’s analytic interpretation were described in detail and reinforced with verbatim excerpts from all the individuals in the research (Smith et al., 2009).

Potential Research Bias

Qualitative methodology is commonly used as an instrument to tie together and investigate the lived experience of the participant. Interviews, while they provide distinctive opportunities to generate understanding from the standpoint of the informer, also mark a characteristically subjective endeavor. This subjective undertaking encompassed the inescapable transmission of emotions, values, assumptions, interests, and theories, throughout all aspects of the research project. These preconceptions contributed to how data were gathered, interpreted, and presented.

The researcher used “bracketing,” which is defined by Gearing (2004) as a “scientific process in which a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance his or her presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon” (p. 1430). Tufford and Newman (2010) noted that while bracketing can lessen adversative effects (dealing with emotionally challenging material), notably it also enables the researcher to attain greater levels of reflection throughout all stages of the research process in “selecting a topic and population, designing the interview, collecting and interpreting data, and reporting findings” (p. 81). The possibility for continued in-depth thinking may improve the perception and acuteness of the research and enable more in depth and multilayered analysis and outcomes (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

VIII. Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological design study was to discover the lived experiences of the undergraduate business students regarding EI. The goal of this research project was to gather rich descriptions and a depth of understanding of the experiences of students of EI as it relates to perceived success. In this chapter the researcher will discuss the study participants, data collection process, interviews responses, and identified themes.

Participants

The researcher recruited the “purposive sample” (Creswell, 2008) comprised of 20 students meeting the inclusion criteria (i.e., traditional undergraduate business students enrolled in the research site). The next step was the screening process to select study participants. This process consisted of the administration of the EI Scale (see Appendix B) to the sample population to select the eight students (see Table) with the highest level of EI (i.e., scores 135 to 159).

IX. Data Collection Process

The researcher conducted individual semi-structured interviews, pursuing the spoken contribution of the participants (Creswell, 2015). The research questions aimed at addressing Goleman’s (1998) EI model, comprising four components of personal and social competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. These are skills the author considered crucial for success. The interview protocol comprised six questions, addressing the following research questions guiding the study.

1. What meaning do undergraduate business school students ascribe to EI and to what extent has EI influenced their academic experience, if at all?
2. How do students describe their lived experiences of EI and relevance of EI in day-to-day student life?
3. How do students use their EI, if at all, when dealing with their major academic challenges?
4. To what extent, if at all, do students attribute their successes in an undergraduate business program to EI?

The researcher propitiated an informal and relaxed environment to conduct the interviews in order to establish rapport. Each interview started with a reminder of the purpose and goals of the study, risks, and benefits for participating, and the voluntary decision to take part in the study. The researcher further ensured participants’ privacy and confidentiality by replacing interviewees’ names with “P” for participant and a consecutive number, one through eight, that is P1, P2, P3, up to P8, respectively.

The interviews were recorded with a digital device. The average length of the interview was approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The researcher transcribed the recorded interviews in his personal office using a headset to ensure participants’ privacy, and confidentiality, saving the files in a password protected computer. After the transcription of each interview the researcher proceeded with the member checking process (Bowen,

2005), providing a copy of the transcript to the interviewee, giving the opportunity to review, clarify, and confirm the accuracy of their responses. Data analysis followed the IPA (Smith et al., 2009) guidelines.

X. Data Analysis

Overall, respondents identified the four EI components as key elements in achieving academic success. The results in the following table show the participants considered the four EI components as key elements in achieving academic success. It also shows the EI components exhibited by each participant during the interview process.

Table
Participants' EI Components

EI components	Participant	n
Self-awareness	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8	8
Self-management	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8	8
Social awareness	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7	6
Relationship management	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8	8

Note. n = number of participants

Participants described their recent academic experience as challenging, exciting, great, wonderful, and interesting. Leaders high on EI are perceived to be empathic, and are adept at identifying others' emotions and nurturing an organizational culture in which individuals seek challenging occasions for organizational success (Clawson, 2012).

Participants used words such as self-discipline and time management. Strahan (1997) posited that self-discipline is one of the basics of EI. Nelson and Nelson (2003) posited that emotional skills of time management, goal fulfillment, and assertive communication are important components in freshmen academic achievement and retention.

Personal qualities of self-control and interpersonal skills were evidenced in interview responses. According to Goleman et al. (2004), self-control is one of the personal competencies of self-management which is how people manage themselves. Interpersonal skills have to do with how individuals manage relationships which is a social competence of relationship management. Some participants explained the need for self-awareness. Self-awareness involves utilizing a person's feelings to guide decisions, and knowing one's feeling and strengths (Goleman et al., 2004). Most participants stressed the importance of social awareness in managing relationships. Respondents also emphasized and recognized that EI was an important motivational factor for academic success. The participants' lived experiences in this research provided a better understanding of the importance of incorporating EI practices in their curriculum.

XI. Discussion

This qualitative phenomenological study addressed the lived experiences of business undergraduate students regarding the impact of EI on their academic success. The investigator conducted individual interviews to assess students' perceptions of the value of EI. The research questions aimed at (a) exploring participants experience as undergraduate business students, (b) identifying participants' perceptions of behaviors and motivation for academic success, (c) learning the traits that assisted students in succeeding academically, and (d) gaining insight into the respondent's ability to identify factors for academic success.

XII. Research Findings

The research pursued responses for the following central question: What meaning do undergraduate business school students ascribe to EI and to what extent has EI influenced their academic experience, if at all? This question was addressed through supporting questions discussed during the individual interviews.

How do students describe their lived experiences of EI and relevance of EI in day-to-day student life? Participants mentioned perseverance, passion, strong will, independence, and optimism. They mentioned a willingness to face challenges and reassurance as well as resourcefulness, organizational skills, and professionalism. They also mentioned determination, persistence, and an ability to sacrifice their time and relationships. Nevertheless, the most prevalent themes identified by respondents were self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

How do students use their EI, if at all, when dealing with their major academic challenges? Based on

the interview responses the central research findings indicate EI can be a contributor to academic achievement and overall student success. Respondents acknowledged the influence of EI skills and abilities on their academic endeavor towards completing the academic program. Furthermore, study participants appreciated EI skills as crucial in their future personal and professional growth. Research findings increase awareness into the need for enhancing EI awareness and development.

To what extent, if at all, do students attribute their successes in an undergraduate business program to EI? Participants described their academic experience as positive, interesting, challenging, and successful. They explained the process of developing social skills, which became helpful when working in teams. Based on the face-to-face interview, the participants spoke about their perseverance and passion as well as strong will, independence, and motivation to achieve academic success. Some participants spoke about self-confidence, interpersonal skills, internal drive, and creativity. They also mentioned integrity, drive, guidance, and positive reinforcement. They reflected on the benefits of adapting, adjusting, and accommodating others as well as the desire to become effective leaders.

Interpretation of Findings

The problem that was addressed by this study was the need to understand the undergraduate student experience or the students' perspective with regard to how EI impacts student success. Research findings demonstrate that students with higher EI scores are likely to perform better academically (Parker, Duffy, et al., 2005; Vela, 2004; Walker, 2006). According to Clark et al. (2003), students can be taught EI competencies in the classroom. Clark et al. (2003) noticed an improvement in EI in students who took a course designed to develop those skills versus students who did not learn those skills in a similar course. Qualter et al. (2007) stated that the significance of EI is so decisive that a curriculum needs to be expanded to incorporate emotional skill competencies into educational platforms.

Self-awareness may perhaps be reflected as the foundation of all further components of EI. It encompasses the individual's capacity to comprehend and identify his or her emotions in relation to how they affect his or her life and work environment (Daft, 2011; Goleman, 1998). Self-awareness entails being focus-oriented, adaptable to change through self-management since this competency involves the ability to be flexible in "adapting to changing situations or overcoming obstacles" (Goleman et al., 2004, p. 39).

Social awareness and learning self-discipline necessitates that individuals understand their feelings and learn how to manage their feelings appropriately, to motivate themselves, and to respond and recognize the feelings of others (Strahan, 1997). Relationship management involves building bonds, teamwork, and collaboration as well as developing empathy. Building bonds means "cultivating and maintaining a web of relationships" (Goleman et al., 2004, p. 39). Empathy has to do with "sensing others' emotions, understanding their perspective, and taking active interest in their concerns" (Goleman et al., 2004, p. 39).

Recent investigation has shown a positive correlation between EI and academic achievement, pointing to a need to further understand EI in educational settings, particularly in relation to its influence on student success. EI may be a meaningful predictor of success in higher education, and "awareness is growing of the role EI plays in academic achievement" (Kamarinos, 2002, p. 92). Research conducted by Parker et al. (2004) revealed that numerous elements of EI were determined to be predictors of academic achievement. AbiSamra (2000) also indicated that there is a positive correlation between EI and academic achievement.

Research conducted by Parker et al. (2004) suggested that various dimensions of EI were found to be predictors of academic success. Petrides et al. (2004) "found that EI moderated the relationship between academic performance and cognitive ability" (p. 4). Without a doubt, organizational leaders, academicians, experts, and management learning organizations have called for superior experiential and pragmatic investigation that addresses whether EI is conceivable (Groves, McEnrue, & Shen, 2008).

Leaders high on EI are perceived to be empathic and are adept at identifying others' emotions and nurturing an organizational culture in which individuals seek challenging occasions for organizational success (Clawson, 2012). According to Holt and Jones (2005), EI is essential in educational venues, and with proper training, students can find success in college and as well-adjusted members of the community. Mayer and Salovey (1997) posited that particular EI competencies are needed for students to succeed throughout their college life. Specifically, students need to have the capacity to distinguish and recognize their own emotions. Students ought to utilize their emotions to enable confident judgments and performances. Students must be capable to recognize their emotions and the reasons they come into contact with them. Finally, students ought to acquire the capacity to successfully manage their emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

EI can be described as the capacity to recognize and convey emotions, to utilize emotions to enable thinking, to comprehend and infer with emotions, and to handle emotions efficiently within oneself and in interactions with others (Mayer et al., 2000). Rode et al.'s (2007) research indicated that individuals with a high degree of EI are capable to manage positive emotions to sustain the energy required for high levels of performance over extended periods of time and to channel negative emotions into constructive activities,

concluding that students possessing high EI would perform better academically.

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to explore the lived experiences of eight undergraduate students with respect to their perception of the influence of EI in college success. The eight students who participated in this study emphasized and recognized that EI was an important factor in their decision-making process for academic success. Based on the research findings, students perceive EI was a key element in achieving academic success.

Implications of the Findings

The participants' lived experiences in this research allowed for a better understanding of the importance of incorporating EI instructional practices in student success programs and in their curriculum. According to Holt and Jones (2005), intellectual capability does not ensure academic accomplishment. EI is perceived to be essential in academic environments, and with applicable training in EI, students will not only be effective and prosperous in school but will also develop into well-adjusted persons in society.

Research conducted by Holt and Jones (2005) attempted to demonstrate the notion of EI in combination with training, education, and organizational behavior in order to improve emotional knowledge within academic and business organizations. Holt and Jones posited that some investigations also have discovered a connection between academic success and social talents, therefore, the importance of EI in academic settings warrants additional investigation. Drago's (2004) research findings determined that academic achievement is associated with learners' ability to identify, use, and bring about their emotions, which proposes the necessity to integrate EI training into higher education degree programs to assist students in augmenting their EI.

Relevance of the study. This research contributed to the importance of the implementation of EI training. The results indicated that EI practices in undergraduate college programs can effectively and positively improve academic success. Respondents in this study identified the four EI components of personal and social competencies as key elements in achieving academic success. The participants' lived experiences in this research provided a better understanding of the importance of incorporating EI practices in their curriculum. This research study could have significant implications for institutions of higher education and also for future research.

Schutte and Malouff (2002) noted that students who completed a course integrating EI into the curriculum demonstrated a considerably higher retention rate compared to students who did not take the course. Developing EI competencies and abilities are vital to designing and preserving a productive college climate in student success programs and instructional practices because EI is a key component to enlightening education and aiding student in achieving superior levels of success and individual well-being (Low et al., 2004). Students' noncognitive abilities, such as EI, have been correlated with academic success as well as professional performance (Bar-On et al., 2007; Goleman, 2006; Mayer et al., 2004), and research conducted by Parker et al. (2004) suggested that numerous components of EI were found to also be predictors of academic success.

In order to become successful in school, as well as in future professional careers, students should be assisted in developing EI skills by means of coaching and educational platforms (Abraham, 2006; Bergman, 2006; Chia, 2005; Codier, 2006; Dhiman, 2008, Justice & Espinosa, 2007; Potter, 2005; Van Rooy, Alonso, & Viswesvaran, 2005). EI could be a contributing factor for academic success through the implementation of curriculum improvement techniques, student services, and specialized courses that can benefit freshmen student success and retention rates through graduation.

Importance to discipline. A greater understanding of the relationship between EI and student success would benefit universities in both admissions decisions and interventions to improve student success by developing EI skills by means of coaching and educational platforms, thereby increasing overall student retention. Further, college students will also benefit from a greater understanding of how undergraduate business students experience EI and in what ways, if any, this phenomenon impacts their ability to successfully navigate the college experience. According to Goleman (1997), those students who develop their EI skills and abilities tend to be more motivated and will strive to seek challenges.

Research has demonstrated that students with higher EI scores are likely to perform better academically (Parker, Duffy, et al., 2005; Vela, 2004; Walker, 2006). Low and Nelson's (2006) research findings indicated that the development of student EI is a significant factor in achievement, retention, college success, personal well-being, professional performance, and leadership.

Shahzada et al.'s (2011) research study discovered a noteworthy relationship between academic achievement and EI and suggested that EI be incorporated in the academic curriculum. Based on research by Shipley et al. (2010), business schools should explore supplementing useful and viable courses that would help students perform at a higher level of EI, which can ultimately assist them in improving their future performance

and interactions in any organization.

According to Goleman et al. (2002), it is hoped that business educators acknowledge the significance of EI in higher education for assisting their graduates in becoming effective leaders. Providing training to students in methods to enhance EI competencies would appear to be a valuable consideration when developing any academic curriculum.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. Please describe your recent academic experiences including any academic successes as an undergraduate business school student.
2. What were the most important behaviors and sources of motivation, which helped you to succeed through your first two years in college?
3. To what personal qualities do you attribute your success as an undergraduate business student?
4. To what extent, if at all, do you attribute your academic success to your emotional intelligence?
5. How, if at all, do you use emotional intelligence when interacting with others in your day-to-day life?
6. How would you describe the ways, if at all, you use emotional intelligence in your overall college experience?

Appendix B

EI Assessment Scale

Directions: Each of the following items asks you about your emotions or reactions associated with emotions. After deciding whether a statement is generally true for you, use the 5-point scale to respond to the statement. Please circle the “1” if you strongly disagree that this is like you, the “2” if you somewhat disagree that this is like you, “3” if you neither agree nor disagree that this is like you, the “4” if you somewhat agree that this is like you, and the “5” if you strongly agree that this is like you.

There are no right or wrong answers. Please give the response that best describes you.

1 = strongly disagree

2 = somewhat disagree

3 = neither agree nor disagree

4 = somewhat agree

5 = strongly agree

1. I know when to speak about my personal problems to others. 1 2 3 4 5
2. When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I expect that I will do well on most things I try. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Other people find it easy to confide in me. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I find it hard to understand the nonverbal messages of other people. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important. 1 2 3 4 5
5. When my mood changes, I see new possibilities. 1 2 3 4 5
6. Emotions are one of the things that make my life worth living. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I am aware of my emotions as I experience them. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I expect good things to happen. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I like to share my emotions with others. 1 2 3 4 5
10. When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I arrange events others enjoy. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I seek out activities that make me happy. 1 2 3 4 5
13. I am aware of the nonverbal messages I send to others. 1 2 3 4 5
14. I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others. 1 2 3 4 5
15. When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me. 1 2 3 4 5
16. By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing. 1 2 3 4 5
17. I know why my emotions change. 1 2 3 4 5
18. When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas. 1 2 3 4 5
19. I have control over my emotions. 1 2 3 4 5
20. I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them. 1 2 3 4 5
21. I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on. 1 2 3 4 5
22. I compliment others when they have done something well. 1 2 3 4 5
23. I am aware of the nonverbal messages other people send. 1 2 3 4 5
24. When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I experienced this event myself. 1 2 3 4 5
25. When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas. 1 2 3 4 5
26. When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail. 1 2 3 4 5
27. I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them. 1 2 3 4 5
28. I help other people feel better when they are down. 1 2 3 4 5
29. I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles. 1 2 3 4 5
30. I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice. 1 2 3 4 5
31. It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do. 1 2 3 4 5

Description of the Measure and Scoring Instructions

The Assessing Emotions Scale is a 33-item self-report inventory focusing on typical emotional intelligence. Respondents rate themselves on the items using a five-point scale. Respondents require on average five minutes to complete the scale. Total scale scores are calculated by reverse coding items 5, 28, and 33, and then summing all items. Scores can range from 33 to 165, with higher scores indicating more characteristic emotional intelligence.