



## **Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance of Students: Exploring Sustainable Higher Education**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical factor influencing professional success and personal development. In the case of this study, the paper studies the relationship between EI and academic performance among students from three colleges in Pokhara: Informatics College Pokhara (ICP), LA Grandee International College, and Pokhara College of Management (PCM). Using the Schutte Self-Report EI Test (SSEIT) to evaluate EI across the variables like self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and empathy, the study categorizes students into high EI, average EI, and needs improvement. Academic performance is assessed through self-reported GPA/marks in their last semester. The findings of the study revealed a positive relation between EI and academic outcomes, suggesting that integrating EI development into academic curriculum can significantly enhance students' academic success and overall well-being. Additionally, the study highlights that students with higher EI scores not only perform better academically but also exhibit superior stress management and interpersonal skills. By focusing on self-regulation and motivation, which emerged as the key indicators of academic performance, the study underscores the transformative potential of EI in the

educational contexts. These findings align with the global research trends, emphasizing the need for the comprehensive EI-based interventions to address the academic and emotional challenges faced by students in Nepal. The study also highlights the importance of fostering EI in the younger generations, preparing them for both academic and professional challenges. It offers the practical insights into integrating the EI frameworks into the education system, aiming to bridge the gap between academic

potential and emotional competence for a holistic student success, contributing to sustainable higher education in Nepal. Additionally, this study applies a developmental perspective, highlighting how EI evolves over time due to age.

**KEYWORDS:** Emotional intelligence, professional development, personal development, academic performance

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI), introduced by Salovey and Mayer in 1990 and later popularized by Goleman in 1995, has emerged as a critical framework for understanding success across the various domains. Unlike the traditional Intelligence Quiz (IQ) metrics that focus primarily on the cognitive abilities, EI emphasizes the emotional and social competencies essential for navigating the complex interpersonal dynamics and achieving the personal and professional goals. EI has received an increasing recognition as a key determinant of success, particularly in the academic contexts. Students with higher EI often display greater resilience, better stress management, and enhanced interpersonal skills, contributing to the improved academic outcomes (MacCann et al., 2020). This acknowledgment has prompted the educational institutions worldwide to incorporate EI into their curricula, recognizing its value in fostering the well-rounded individuals.

Despite a growing body of research globally, the relationship between EI and academic performance in Nepal remains underexplored. This study seeks to address this research gap by examining how EI influences academic success among the college students in Pokhara. Specifically, it aims to evaluate the EI levels among students from three colleges—Informatics College Pokhara (ICP), LA Grandee International College, and Pokhara College of Management (PCM)—while exploring the correlation between EI and academic outcomes. The study further investigates how emotional competencies can mitigate the challenges experienced in the high-pressure academic environments. By emphasizing EI as a critical competency, the study intends to bridge the gap between emotional well-being and scholastic achievements, offering the valuable insights for the educational policymakers. The findings of this study could encourage the development of interventions addressing both the cognitive and emotional aspects of learning in Nepal, ultimately fostering the holistic student development.

Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of EI can be considered as the ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions. EI comprises self-awareness, or the ability to recognize and understand one's emotions; self-regulation, which refers to effectively managing emotions in various situations; motivation, or the ability to harness emotions toward goal attainment; and empathy, or the capacity to understand and share the feelings of others. Goleman's (1995) framework extends this model by including social skills, emphasizing the role of EI in the interpersonal interactions and social relationships. Both models reflect the multifaceted nature of EI, which makes it an essential attribute for success in the personal, academic, and professional spheres.

To measure EI in this study, the Schutte Self-Report EI Test (SSEIT) will be employed. SSEIT has proven to be a reliable and widely accepted tool in academic research, assessing EI across the four primary dimensions outlined by Salovey and Mayer (1990). Numerous studies have established its validity and adaptability across the diverse cultural and educational contexts. For instance, Goleman et al. (2021) utilized SSEIT to examine EI among the secondary school students, uncovering a strong predictive relationship between EI and academic success. Furthermore, its relevance to Nepali educational settings has been validated by research, such as Sharma and

Adhikari's (2022) study on EI and student performance in Pokhara. These findings underscore the utility of SSEIT in investigating the role of EI in various academic settings.

Globally, research has consistently demonstrated the importance of EI as a significant predictor of academic success. MacCann et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis that revealed a strong correlation between the high levels of EI and enhanced academic performance across various educational levels. According to the study, students with advanced emotional competencies were better equipped to manage stress, maintain focus, and navigate the demands of academic environments. Similarly, Shao et al. (2020) examined the mediating effects of self-efficacy and learning anxiety in the relationship between EI and academic achievement among Chinese university students. Their findings highlighted how the higher levels of EI contribute to reduced learning anxiety and greater self-efficacy, both of which positively influence the academic outcomes.

A study conducted by Thomas and Zolkoski (2020) explored the role of burnout in shaping the EI and academic performance among the college students. The study emphasized that the burnout undermines students' EI and, consequently, their ability to achieve an academic success. It also recommended implementing the EI-focused interventions to improve the resilience and academic performance in the higher education settings. Similarly, Sánchez-Álvarez et al. (2020) performed a meta-analysis of secondary education students, which consistently affirmed the positive relationship between EI and academic performance across the diverse education systems. These findings collectively underscore the universal relevance of EI in promoting an academic success and addressing the challenges in educational environments.

The relationship between EI and age has also been examined in various studies, suggesting that EI develops with age and life experiences. The older students and adults often show higher EI due to their experience of social interactions, problem-solving scenarios, and emotional regulation experiences (Zeidner et al., 2009). According to Mayer et al. (2016), EI increases with age as the individuals acquire greater self-awareness, emotional regulation skills, and social adaptability. Additionally, Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera (2016) highlight that as the individuals age, they develop a stronger handling and dealing system, which enhance their ability to manage stress and build the interpersonal relationships. These studies reinforce the importance of considering age-related EI development in the educational frameworks.

Regional studies offer further insights into the significance of EI. Alghamdi et al. (2021), for instance, investigated the correlation between EI and academic performance among the health sciences students in Saudi Arabia. The study revealed that students with higher EI achieved better academic results, reinforcing the role of EI in education. In Nepal, Adhikari and Paudel (2020) examined the EI levels among the college students and their corresponding academic achievements. The study demonstrated a strong relationship between EI and academic success, particularly regarding the interpersonal skills and stress management capabilities. Sharma and Thapa (2021) conducted another study on EI and its role in managing academic stress among students in Kathmandu, finding that the individuals with higher EI were better equipped to cope with the academic pressures, leading to the improved academic outcomes.

These regional and global findings indicate that EI has a critical influence on various facets of student performance. As noted by Zohar and Drach-Zahavy (2020), students with higher EI are more likely to adopt the adaptive coping mechanisms, positively impacting their time management, communication, and interpersonal

relationships. EI also fosters effective collaboration, essential for the academic group projects and other cooperative tasks. Furthermore, Singh et al. (2021) demonstrated the value of integrating the EI-focused interventions into the academic curricula, showing that these initiatives significantly enhanced the academic outcomes by boosting students' confidence, resilience, and stress management skills.

Despite these global advancements, the relationship between EI and academic performance remains underexplored in Nepal. The educational institutions in the country largely focus on the cognitive and technical aspects of learning, often neglecting emotional competencies. This study aims to address this oversight by providing an evidence of the significant role that EI plays in determining an academic success. By evaluating the EI levels among the college students in Pokhara and exploring its influence on their academic performance, the study seeks to highlight the potential benefits of incorporating the EI training into the Nepali educational frameworks. The findings could inform the educational policymakers and practitioners, encouraging the adoption of holistic approaches that emphasize both cognitive and emotional development.

The connection between EI and academic performance has been extensively documented in literature. For instance, several studies suggest that EI impacts students' abilities to regulate emotions, manage stress, and maintain motivation, all of which are essential for an academic success (MacCann et al., 2020; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2020). Furthermore, students with higher EI are often better at navigating the complex social and emotional dynamics, enhancing their ability to form the supportive peer relationships and collaborate effectively with others. These skills are crucial not only for academic performance but also for overall personal development.

To ensure the integration of EI into the academic environments, the targeted interventions should be developed. The educational institutions can incorporate EI-focused workshops, peer support programs, and stress management training into their curricula. Moreover, teachers can be trained to recognize and foster emotional competencies among students, creating more inclusive and supportive learning environments. The policies that prioritize the development of emotional and social skills alongside the cognitive skills can significantly enhance the academic outcomes and better prepare students for future challenges.

The study of EI in the academic contexts has gained a significant traction globally due to its strong association with academic performance. EI influences the key factors such as stress management, interpersonal relationships, and motivation, which directly impact students' ability to succeed academically. While the global and regional studies have consistently highlighted the critical role of EI, its application in Nepal's education system remains limited. By exploring the EI levels among the college students in Pokhara and examining its relationship with the academic outcomes, this study aims to contribute to a growing body of research on EI in education. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of integrating the EI-focused interventions into the Nepali educational frameworks, paving a way for more holistic approaches to student development. The findings could provide the valuable insights for the policymakers, educators, and researchers, underscoring the need to prioritize emotional competencies in education, thus fostering the well-rounded individuals capable of excelling in both academic and personal space.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study adopts quantitative as well as qualitative research design to explore the relationship between EI and academic performance among the college students. The primary tool for EI assessment is SSEIT, which evaluates self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and empathy across 33 questions. Academic performance is measured using students' self-reported GPA and marks from their most recent semester. Further, the experts' discussion on the EI and academic performance has also been reviewed.

### **Population and Sample**

The study sample consists of college students from three academic institutions in Pokhara: ICP, LA Grandee, and PCM. A stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure a diverse representation of EI categories (high EI, average EI, and needs improvement). A total of 116 students participated in the study, with different representations of male and female students across the three institutions.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The data were collected through the structured self-administered questionnaires. SSEIT was used to assess the EI levels, while the participants were asked to report their academic performance based on the GPA or numerical marks. To ensure accuracy, students were briefed about EI and on how to complete the questionnaire, and anonymity was maintained to encourage the honest responses.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

The collected data were analyzed using the mathematical analysis. Bar graphs and college independent analysis have been done to extract information about the EI levels and the level of academic performance.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In the process of this study, several ethical considerations were carefully observed to ensure the integrity and validity of the study. Prior to data collection, all participants attended a 30-minute session on EI. This session was designed to educate students about the concept of EI, ensuring that they had a clear understanding of the topic and could approach the survey with the informed perspectives. After the session, the participants voluntarily completed the survey, which included SSEIT. The informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time without any repercussions. The study adhered to the principles of fairness and impartiality, avoiding any form of bias or discrimination.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The study evaluated the data from three colleges—ICP, LA Grande, and PCM—to analyze the relationship between students' EI levels and their academic performance as measured by GPA. The findings reveal the distinct patterns in the EI distribution and GPA averages across the colleges, highlighting the significant insights into the interplay between emotional competencies and academic success.

**Table 1***Average GPA and Number of Students*

College	Number of Students	Average GPA
ICP	34	2.91
PCM	28	3.26
LA Grande	54	3.32

At ICP, the sample comprised 34 students, who exhibited a moderate average GPA of 2.91 as seen in Table 1. The EI distribution indicated that 67.65% of the students fell within the High EI category, while 32.35% were classified as having Average EI. Notably, no students at ICP were categorized under the "Needs Improvement" EI level. This strong representation of High EI students aligns with their consistent academic performance, though the college's average GPA remains relatively moderate as compared to others in the study.

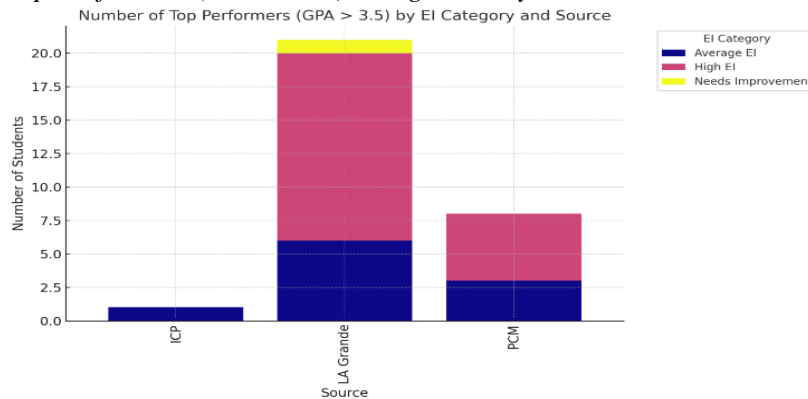
**Table 2***EI Level Distribution*

College	High EI	Average EI	Needs Improvement	Total Students
ICP	23	11	0	34
PCM	17	11	0	28
LA Grande	34	17	3	54

For PCM, the total sample consisted of 28 students, who demonstrated an average GPA of 3.26 as seen in Table 1 is higher than ICP's average. A significant proportion (60.71%) of students were categorized as having High EI, while the remaining 39.29% were classified under Average EI. Similar to ICP, PCM had no students in the "Needs Improvement" EI category as seen in Table 2, suggesting that strong emotional competencies are a common attribute among its student body. This higher concentration of students with High EI appears to correlate with the college's above-average academic performance.

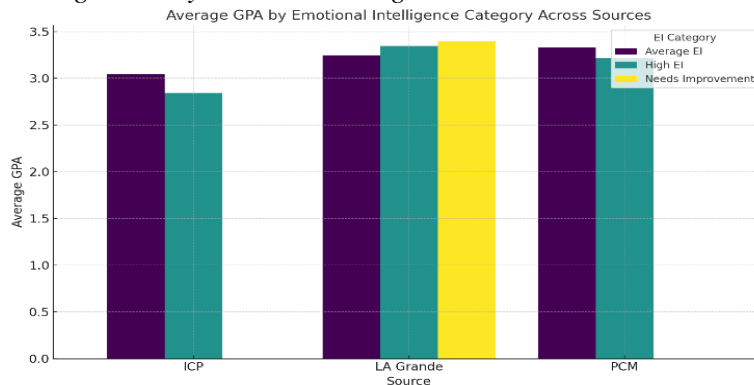
In contrast, LA Grande, which had the largest sample size with 54 students, recorded the highest average GPA at 3.32 among the three colleges. The EI distribution revealed that 62.96% of students exhibited High EI, 31.48% had Average EI, and a small proportion, 5.56%, fell under the "Needs Improvement" category. While the majority of students at LA Grande demonstrated high emotional competencies, the presence of students needing improvement underscores the importance of targeted interventions to enhance the EI development for this subset of students.

Overall, the results establish a positive correlation between EI and academic performance across all three colleges, with a higher prevalence of High EI students coinciding with better academic outcomes. The variation in the EI distribution and GPA averages highlights the influence of institutional contexts on students' emotional and academic development. The presence of students in the "Needs Improvement" category, observed only at LA Grande, further emphasizes a need for the tailored strategies to support the emotional growth and its subsequent impact on the scholastic achievement. These findings provide a solid foundation for further exploration of the interplay between EI and academic success within the diverse educational environments.

**Figure 1***Top Performers (GPA > 3.5) Categorized by EI Level**Source: Field Survey 2024*

The chart shows the distribution of top-performing students (those with a GPA > 3.5) grouped by their EI (EI) categories—High, Average, and Needs Improvement—for each of the three colleges: ICP, LA Grande, and PCM.

The distribution of top academic performers across the EI categories varies by institution, reflecting the significant relationships between EI and academic success. LA Grande emerges with the highest number of top performers overall, with a significant concentration in the High EI category, emphasizing the potential link between strong emotional competencies and academic achievement. Across all institutions, students in the High EI category consistently represent the largest proportion of top performers, further supporting the positive correlation between the elevated EI and superior academic outcomes. The institutions like PCM and ICP also demonstrate clear contributions from the High EI group to high GPA performance, underscoring the importance of EI in fostering an academic success. However, the notable numbers of top performers in the Average EI category, particularly at LA Grande, suggest that the additional factors beyond EI may also influence the top academic performance. Conversely, there is minimal to no representation of students from the “Needs Improvement” EI category among the top performers, indicating that the struggles with EI may present the barriers to achieving the higher GPAs. These findings collectively highlight the critical role of EI while also acknowledging the complexity of factors contributing to academic excellence.

**Figure 2***Average GPA by EI across Colleges**Source: Field Survey 2024*



The distribution of EI levels was consistent across the three colleges. While all three institutions exhibited the similar patterns, students from LA Grandee demonstrated the highest average GPA across all EI categories. This could be attributed to the institutional factors such as the mentoring programs and stress management workshops, which may have contributed to the higher EI scores.

## Discussion

The qualitative insights from the video featuring Berney and Marshall (2019) provide a clear understanding of the relationship between EI and academic performance. They emphasize how the emotional awareness facilitates effective self-regulation and motivation, enabling students to handle the academic challenges with resilience. They underscore the importance of empathy and interpersonal skills in fostering a collaboration and building the supportive relationships within the academic settings.

Both experts stress the significance of integrating the EI-focused initiatives, such as the workshops and mentoring, into the educational frameworks to enhance emotional competencies and academic outcomes. Berney and Marshall (2019) further argue that fostering EI contributes not only to an academic success but also to students' overall emotional well-being.

These qualitative perspectives align with the findings of this study, which revealed a strong positive correlation between EI and academic performance. The emphasis on self-regulation, motivation, and empathy reinforces the role of EI in equipping students with the tools needed to navigate academic stress and achieve success.

These findings also emphasize the necessity of addressing the EI differences within the academic context. The presence of a small subset of students in the "Needs Improvement" EI category, observed particularly at LA Grande, underscores the importance of targeted interventions to bridge the emotional competency gaps. Addressing these challenges at an early stage could prevent the exacerbation of stress-related academic struggles, potentially resulting in better scholastic and personal outcomes for such students. Furthermore, the global relevance of EI initiatives, as highlighted by the international studies, underscores the potential for their successful application within Nepal's education system, despite differing the cultural and institutional dynamics.

Incorporating the EI-focused interventions, such as the workshops, peer mentoring programs, and personalized coaching sessions, could significantly benefit the Nepali student population. For instance, the stress management sessions could provide students with the tools to cope with the academic pressures, while the interpersonal skills training could enhance their ability to work effectively in the group settings. Additionally, including the EI training in the teacher development programs could ensure that the educators are equipped to model and reinforce emotional competencies, creating a supportive and emotionally aware learning environment.

Expanding on these strategies, integrating the EI principles into the existing curricula can cultivate an emotional awareness as a foundational skill rather than an optional competency. The assignments or group activities that challenge students to manage emotions, exhibit empathy, and cooperate effectively can reinforce EI in a practical context. Leveraging technology, such as the digital tools and apps tailored to foster an emotional well-being, could also make the EI interventions more accessible. These approaches may be particularly impactful for bridging the regional or institutional



disparities in the resources and access, making it feasible to implement such programs across the diverse educational settings in Nepal.

Furthermore, the role of peer interactions and mutual support cannot be overlooked. The peer-led initiatives, such as the student support groups or the EI ambassadors within the colleges, could provide the relatable role models and foster an inclusive, emotionally intelligent community. These programs could also encourage students to take responsibility for their emotional well-being while assisting their peers, creating a ripple effect of emotional awareness and collaboration across the college environments. Such practices not only enhance the academic atmosphere but also ensure a culture of empathy and mutual growth among students. Additionally, as this study suggests, EI tends to develop with age, meaning that the interventions should be tailored to the different student age groups. Students require a foundational emotional regulation training and they could also benefit from the advanced EI strategies that build on their life experiences and interpersonal maturity.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm the significance of EI in shaping the academic outcomes among the college students in Pokhara. Students with high EI demonstrated stronger academic performance, better stress management, and superior interpersonal skills as compared to their peers with the lower EI scores. The study highlights self-regulation and motivation as the pivotal components of EI that directly contribute to an academic success. However, the limited representation of students in the "Needs Improvement" EI category at some institutions underscores the need for the targeted interventions to enhance emotional competencies.

While the data largely supports a positive correlation between EI and academic achievement, several factors, such as cultural and institutional differences, may influence the observed outcomes. The study provides the critical insights for integrating the EI-focused strategies into the educational frameworks, encouraging the institutions to adopt a holistic approach to student development.

By fostering EI in students, the educational institutions can prepare them not only for the academic challenges but also for the professional demands of the modern world. Future research could investigate the longitudinal impacts of EI development and its relationship with a long-term professional and personal success, offering a more comprehensive understanding of its transformative potential. Therefore, the educational institutions should design the age-specific EI interventions to cater to the varying levels of emotional maturity.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations can be applied to strengthen the role of EI in the academic environments. These suggestions aim to address the existing gaps and foster a more holistic approach to student development:

1. Age Specific Curriculum Integration: Incorporate the EI training into the curriculum to enhance students' emotional competencies.
2. Workshops and Mentoring: Conduct the regular workshops on stress management, self-regulation, and interpersonal skills.
3. Institutional Support: Provide the resources such as the counseling services and peer mentoring programs to support students emotionally.

4. Further Research: Future studies could explore the longitudinal impact of EI on the academic and professional outcomes, expanding the sample size to include the diverse educational settings.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

*I hereby wish to declare that I do not have any conflict of interests to disclose. However, I declare that the manuscript has not been published before and is not being considered for publication elsewhere.*

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

*I declare that this manuscript is originally produced by me.*

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