

## **A Study Assessing Student Leadership Skills Through Emotional Intelligence**

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### **Abstract**

Research in career and student success is emphasizing the need for students to know their Emotional Intelligence (EI) score. Leadership is viewed more highly by future employers than GPA (Low & Nelson, 2004). In this study, the researchers used an EI assessment to analyze leadership styles to determine if males and females differed and found a difference in one area. The researchers recommended that awareness of EI scores could be beneficial in career development.

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What is an emotionally intelligent individual? This is an individual who envisions every opportunity as a chance for growth and development. This individual knows how to lead with his or her heart and motivates others toward reaching success. According to Low and Nelson (2005), "An emotionally intelligent individual has a healthy and optimistic orientation and is productive, with a mastery of emotional skills essential for self-renewal, resiliency, and personal excellence" (p. 2). Emotional intelligence is all part of a students' ability to discover their individual learning styles and figure out what leadership strengths they have and concentrate on those strengths to achieve success.

Students can then focus on their weaknesses and try to find ways to strengthen those weaknesses and turn them into opportunities to understand themselves better and grow. Emotional Intelligence encompasses a variety of factors; however, more emphasis is placed on the following factors described as personal competence and social competence to recognize leadership in the individual (Carter, Bishop, & Kravits, 2006). Skills involved for students to develop are interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, self-management in life, and personal leadership. The four skills comprise two distinct factors of emotional intelligence in determining how individuals self-manage their personal relationships with other people and finding motivating factors towards establishing positive values in their lives (Low, Lomax, Jackson, & Nelson, 2004). Parrish (2015) found that emotional intelligence traits associated with “empathy, inspiring and guiding others, and self-management were most applicable to establishing academic leadership” (p. 830).

The interpersonal skill factor focuses on creating positive relationships with others and establishing effective communication skills with other people. The key emotional skills in this category that are considered are an individual’s assertion, aggression, and deference. Therefore, these skills test how individuals react when confronting new people or meeting the demands of others. How individuals assist in meeting others needs and their own is another example of how these skills may manifest in a person’s interpersonal skill set. Low and Nelson (2006) stated, “The absolute key to truly understanding and improving communication skills is in the stressful and emotional situations in life” (p. 2). Communicating effectively with others through self-expression, feelings, and being open and honest with others may create a positive relationship (Low, 2000). Effective communication does raise some questions such as the following: How would a person react when confronting new people? How do individuals communicate when they meet someone new? How do people approach different situations that occur in the environment when confronted with other individuals?

The Intrapersonal development skill factor requires the full development of a strong personal belief system and the effective management of the pressures and stresses of life and work. The key emotional skills that are emphasized in this category are self-esteem and stress management (Low & Nelson, 2005). This category of emotional intelligence measures the balance a person has between productivity at work and time at home. The questions addressed through this category are the following: What does a person accomplish when they are at home or at work? How can an individual balance home and work?

The factor of self-management in life and career includes motivation, achievement, drive, and efficient use of resources, personal commitment, and a positive approach to change. The key emotional skills involved with this section are drive strength, time management, commitment ethic, and positive personal change (Low & Nelson, 2005). Self-management encompasses how individuals are willing to change given certain situations in their environment. Motivation determines how much drive strength individuals must have to accomplish certain objectives they set for themselves. The way in which individuals use their time is an emotional skill they learn to master. Using time wisely to accomplish goals and objectives may be of great benefit in developing self-management skills (Barbuto & Burbach, 2006).

The last emotional intelligence factor is the personal leadership factor. The four emotional skills involved with this factor include comfort, empathy, decision making, and leadership. This type of leadership requires social skills, the ability to understand and respect the views of others, the ability to solve problems, and the ability to lead oneself in positive ways (Low & Nelson, 2005). This last leadership factor focuses on how an individual relates to others and establishes relationships with others. Critical and analytic thinking also comes into perspective as a key factor in determining the abilities to be creative and solve problems that life brings to an individual. Knowing an individual's own goal can be a leading motivator toward accomplishing objectives and goals other people set for them (Low & Nelson, 2005).

The question arises whether males differ from females in their emotional intelligence scores. If so, on which areas of emotional intelligence do males rank higher than females, and on which areas do females rank higher than males? Is it possible that females rank higher in areas such as self-management and interpersonal communications while males rank higher than females in areas such as personal leadership and intrapersonal skills? This research sought to answer some of these questions. The study examined the difference in leadership styles between male and female students taking the freshmen seminar course.

### **Literature Review**

The transitions that college students face when coming from a high-school setting may be very difficult for some students. Students are leaving their comfort zones and the safety of being at home to becoming independent individuals where they must assume responsibilities that otherwise were undertaken by their parents (Vandervoort, 2006). Fear and insecurity for the unknown are just some examples that college students face during their first semester. In being independent students must learn to think critically and be responsible in every aspect of their lives whether it is with juggling a full-time schedule of classes, finding a part-time job to help support their bills, or dealing with relationships (Nelson, Low, & Hammett, 2017).

The college atmosphere is different from high school and there are new people and interactions to handle every day. The need to build up students' cognitive and emotional skills becomes a factor in helping them determine their success. The effective handling of personal relationships with other people is a common problem with incoming freshmen students (Vandervoort, 2006). The realization of self-management also plays a major role in shaping students' lives. Students must self-manage in many areas such as time management where students must get to class on time or manage how to balance working a part-time job and going to school at the same time. Self-management also encompasses students' drive strength and motivation towards personal goals they set for themselves (Kristjansson, 2006). The way in which students can adapt to their ever-changing environment is also a skill that they must master. The career and work environment is changing and so is the need for skilled workers who can think for themselves and think critically (Nelson, Low, & Nelson, 2005). The use of Emotional Intelligence is helpful to guide students towards their goals and careers. Prendergast (2016) found that emotional intelligence is used to motivate employees to achieve the objectives and goals for organizations by incorporating emotional intelligence in the organization's mission,

vision, and values. Low and Nelson (2005) found that with the current emphasis on academic accountability, emotional intelligence emphasizes the means of establishing positive behaviors that individuals value such as positive self-esteem, meaningful goal achievement, dependability, effective communication, constructive thinking, emotional self-control, problem-solving skills, and healthy stress-management skills.

In recent research conducted with Chinese university students, Wang, Xie, and Cui (2016) found positive correlations between emotional intelligence, self-leadership, and self-efficacy. The results indicated that students, high in emotional intelligence skills, could effectively manage stressful situations and implement positive coping strategies. All these related skills involve a higher psychological process and the integration of the cognitive and emotional mind. The process evolves around the student establishing leadership skills to help themselves become responsible adults and to establish an awareness of their leadership strengths and weaknesses. Research in leadership assessment skills in both graduate and undergraduate college students have indicated an importance of emotional intelligence skills for leadership development in other leadership categories such as drive strength, building trusting relationships, critical and analytical thinking, and conceptual management skills (Majid et al., 2012). In a recent study examining pharmaceutical students' emotional intelligent leadership skills, Haight et al. (2017) found that emotional intelligence skills have positive connections in the leadership categories of inter-professional collaboration, leadership, and communication skills. This would provide an overall picture of emotional intelligence and its importance to students' personal development in their academic career.

Emotional Intelligence is assessed based upon the Emotional Intelligence Instrument that assesses 13 skill levels in which individuals often rank differently. The 13 skills are divided into four components in which Emotional Intelligence is measured. The four components are interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, leadership skills, and self-management skills. Within each of these components are 13 skill levels: assertion, comfort, empathy, decision making, leadership, drive strength, time management, commitment ethic, self-esteem, stress management, aggression, deference, and change orientation (Nelson, Low, & Vela, 2003). The first component of Emotional Intelligence, which is the interpersonal component, focuses on assertion of the individual, anger control and management and fear control and management. In this component, students learn their communication patterns and skills. "Assertion is defined as the ability to clearly and honestly communicate personal thoughts and feelings of another person in a comfortable, direct, appropriate, and straightforward manner" (Low & Nelson, 2005, p. 10). The more a student is assertive the more they feel confident to speak their mind and take the listener into consideration by hearing them speak their ideas. Assertive communication is a positive way of talking to people and expressing one's own thoughts, feelings, and ideas in a way that promotes understanding by all those involved. Assertion is a skill in the interpersonal skills component because assertion is the key emotional skill essential for developing positive relationships and social groups with others (Low & Nelson, 2004).

Leadership Skills comprise the next categorical component and encompass the emotional skills of comfort, empathy, decision-making, and leadership ability. The emotional skills determine how individuals interact with their environment given certain situations that occur in daily life. The level of comfort individuals may feel when they are

taking their first college exam or the level of comfort feel when they give their first presentation to a class full of their peers are some examples. Students may empathize with one of their classmates when difficulties arise or may actively listen to other individuals' ideas. Making the appropriate decisions that will affect certain outcomes is also very important in the classroom environment as well as the workplace environment where a boss might ask a subordinate to make a decision about a certain project or assume responsibility for an important deal. Recognizing the important decision-making skills an individual already possesses may influence the individual to build upon those strengths and bolster any weaknesses (Low & Nelson, 2006).

Self-Management is also another component that makes up Emotional Intelligence. The emotional skills involved with this category require an individual to recognize the motivation behind what he or she does to accomplish certain goals and achievements. Time Management falls into this category by assisting the students in organizing their time into a schedule where they may be able to meet the demands of the classroom or the workplace or both. Commitment Ethic also plays a role in this category because the students recognize their ability to commit themselves to tasks even in a demanding situation that takes up time and energy (Low & Nelson, 2004).

Intrapersonal Skills is the fourth category of Emotional Intelligence that encompasses the emotional skills of self-esteem and stress management. This category stresses the belief that individuals view themselves as having a positive attitude towards accomplishing their own goals. If they believe that they can accomplish their goals instead of thinking negatively, then more than likely they will accomplish their goals. Stress management also comes into this Emotional Intelligence component in how individuals respond and self-manage themselves through stressful events that occur in their lives.

The ability to have self-control is very important in an individual's career and in everyday life. However, according to Chapman and Hayslip (2005), "Women tend to report slightly higher on their Emotional Intelligence assessment than men in this category" (p. 158). Men tend to report more loneliness and stress relating to family stress and social stress on the Emotional Intelligence scale than women who took the assessment. Emotional Intelligence is an area that will be considered in the future by prospective employers and researchers as a benefit to society. Emotional Intelligence enhances awareness of personal and emotional competencies. Individuals aware of their Emotional Intelligence score can lead healthy and productive lives in which they may work on those areas in which they scored low and enhance those areas in which they scored high (Miville, Carlozzi, Gushue, Schara, & Ueda, 2006).

## **Methods**

This study was designed to compare the differences in how females and male students majoring in the business field differ in their leadership skills and styles. In addition, the study may also broaden the awareness of career counselors, higher education administrators, and student perceptions of the differences in how females differ from males in their Emotional Intelligence leadership styles; therefore, providing the necessary information to assist male and female students in making necessary choices in

their careers and in their lives regarding their weaknesses and strengths. Emotional Intelligence is very important and regarded highly by employers looking for well-rounded job candidates to fill their positions.

Quantitative methods using survey design methods were used to collect data for this study investigating the differences between males and females and their leadership styles based on the Emotional Intelligence assessment survey from a south Texas university. The surveys were administered as part of the course curriculum for the students' course grade. An identified group of individuals were provided with the survey that analyzed their Emotional Intelligence scores. De-identified data were collected in a secure and anonymous manner, analyzed ethically and responsibly, and interpreted using a spreadsheet and statistical methods.

### **Research Design**

Quantitative design was an advantageous technique for this study because it facilitates the process of collecting raw data, formulating percentages, and interpreting data taken from survey instruments. A survey completed by freshman seminar business administration students provided the data for this survey. The actual figures and percentages were reported through quantitative research techniques.

### **Population and Sample**

The survey was disseminated to freshman seminar business administration students, who were not familiar or knowledgeable of the survey instrument or how they rank with their Emotional Intelligence score. Data were collected from self-administered de-identified surveys which gathered information ranking students taking the survey as far as their leadership skills, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, and self-management skills. Respondents recorded their knowledge and attitudes towards the questions on a three-point scale. Respondents would choose M, S, or L. According to Nelson et al. (2003), "**M** means most likely to describe you, **S** means sometimes like or descriptive of you and sometimes not, **L** means least like or descriptive of you" (p. 2). Respondents would make their choices depending on how they felt about the question, which was formatted as a hypothetical situation. A total of 100 were returned to the researchers and the surveys were processed in an ethical manner and were reflective of the respondent population.

### **Instrumentation**

The survey instrument consisted of four parts which included interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, self-management skills, and leadership skills. The four parts are designed to provide a descriptive analysis by collecting quantitative data. All participants, who participated in the study, were instructed to answer the questions honestly and accurately. The participants responded to questions on a three-point scale survey: **M**-meaning most like or descriptive of you, **S**-meaning sometimes like or descriptive of you, and **L**-means least like or descriptive of you. Questions were placed in a situational

perspective in which the respondent answered each situational question with an emotional emphasis.

## **Procedures**

During a freshmen seminar class period, representatives from the Emotional Intelligence Institute gave a brief presentation to the freshman class and distributed the surveys. Students were provided approximately 45-50 minutes to complete the survey during the class period. Students handed the completed surveys to one of the researchers. The researchers tabulated the scores for each scale on the mini-profile section of the survey and plotted their progress on page nine of the survey instrument. The instructor then copied the front cover of survey page one containing de-identified pre-existing participant information and page nine of the results section. The surveys were provided back to the students and the copies were given to the Emotional Intelligence Institute where the information was placed in a secured database. The next class day, a representative from the Emotional Intelligence Institute gave the participants a presentation about their results. The researchers obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects (IRB) and the Emotional Intelligence Institute to obtain the raw data necessary to conduct statistics and analyze the information.

## **Data Collection and Recording**

Confidentiality was ensured through the collection of the survey instrument made by representatives of the Emotional Intelligence Institute and consent form documents. Data from the students were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment Survey (ESAP). Since the instrument measures the dissemination and procedural collection of data for each of the 4 ESAP categories of the instrument this ensures validity. The instrument is also reliable since it measures each of the 4 ESAP categories on a continuous basis. The survey population exhibited a high degree of interest and response to the survey.

## **Results**

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative responses were recorded and tabulated using the Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment Survey (ESAP). Further information was analyzed using tables from the Microsoft Excel program and IBM®SPSS® statistics software. Data were reported in actual figures and percentages. Responses were recorded on a three-point scale survey: **M**-meaning most like or descriptive of you, **S**-meaning sometimes like and descriptive of you and sometimes not, **L**-meaning least like or descriptive of you. The data were then tabulated and reported.

## Data Analysis and Results

This study used descriptive statistics to examine the pre-existing de-identified data of students enrolled in freshmen seminar classes for two years. Therefore, a compliance of 347 records was statistically sampled to determine the results of the analysis and answer the selected research questions.

### **Question 1: What is the effect of gender on Emotional Intelligence on Leadership Skills such as Interpersonal Skills, Self-Management Skills, and Intrapersonal Skills among students enrolled in Business Freshmen Seminar Class?**

This question was addressed using an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedure and descriptive statistics for each of the three leadership skill variables. Gender was used as the independent variable with interpersonal skills, self-management skills, intrapersonal skills, and leadership skills each serving as separate dependent variables. A statistically significant difference was present between males and females on the intrapersonal skills variable,  $F(1, 293) = 4.896, p < .028$ . Males had a higher score on this variable than did females. Higher scores meant that male students, when compared to female students, had more positive beliefs on how they viewed themselves regarding having a positive attitude toward accomplishing their own goals. Stress management also comes into this emotional intelligence component in how individuals respond and self-manage themselves through stressful events. Because male students scored higher than female students, it seems that male students self-manage their emotions and are likely to control the stress in their environment more than female students.

An ANOVA, conducted on the variable of interpersonal skills did not yield a statistically significant difference,  $F(1, 288) = 0.689, p > .407$ . Males and females did not differ in their interpersonal skills scores. An ANOVA, conducted on the variable of leadership skills did not yield a statistically significant difference,  $F(1, 293) = 0.856, p > .356$ . Males and females did not differ in their leadership skills scores. A similar finding was present on the self-management skill variable,  $F(1, 293) = 0.024, p > .877$ . Males and females did not differ in their self-management skill scores. Descriptive statistics were analyzed for each skill level in which means and standard deviations were compared. Tables 1.1-1.4 display descriptive statistics in comparing means and standard deviations for the Intrapersonal, Self-Management, Interpersonal, and Leadership skills categories.

Table 1.1

#### *Descriptive Statistics for Intrapersonal Skills*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Intrapersonal Skills (Males)	36.06	7.683
Intrapersonal Skills (Females)	33.97	8.385



Table 1.2

*Descriptive Statistics for Self-Management Skill*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-Management Skills (Males)	79.1073	16.06785
Self-Management Skills (Females)	79.4068	16.63856

Table 1.3

*Descriptive Statistics for Interpersonal Skills*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Interpersonal Skills (Males)	76.5087	14.47235
Interpersonal Skills (Females)	77.9487	14.53227

Table 1.4

*Descriptive Statistics for Leadership Skills*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Leadership Skills (Males)	34.37	7.669
Leadership Skills (Females)	35.20	7.506

**Question 2: How did female students rank in business freshman seminar class as opposed to male students on all four parts of the Emotional Intelligence survey?** This question was addressed by examining the means that were calculated for each of these variables in the previous statistical analysis. Readers are referred to Table 2. Only for the intrapersonal skills variable did males and females differ.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Female Scores on the EI Components*

Females	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Intrapersonal Variable	33.97	8.385
Leadership Skills Variable	35.20	7.506
Interpersonal Skills Variable	77.9487	14.53227
Self-Management Skills Variable	79.4068	16.63856

**Question 3: How do male students rank in business freshman seminar class as opposed to female students on all four parts of the Emotional Intelligence survey?** This question was addressed by examining the means that were calculated for each of these variables in the previous statistical analysis (see Table 2). Readers are referred to Table 3. Only for the intrapersonal skills variable did males and females differ.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Male Scores on the EI Components*

MALES	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Leadership Skills Variable	34.37	7.669
Intrapersonal Skills Variable	36.06	7.683
Interpersonal Skills Variable	76.5087	14.47235
Self-Management Skills Variable	79.1073	16.06785

**Question 4: What is a typical profile of a beginning business student?** This question was addressed by using an independent sample multi-variate analysis test together with descriptive statistics to obtain results on male business students and female business students on all four components of the ESAP. The findings indicated that a typical profile of a beginning business student shows that both males and females enroll into college with high leadership skills from high school. Their leadership ability in relation to being involved in activities was very high and they took part in some type of action to motivate others or to serve as a role model for others. As future business leaders, it is wise to assume that students that go into the business college have a well-

rounded sense of skills that just needs to be enhanced through the business courses taken in their major to become aspiring business leaders.

In the category of interpersonal skills, the typical business student profile was that both males and females ranked very high. This indicates that both genders were very social and get along well with others. Establishing long-term relationships and friendships was very important to both genders in the classroom environment and in out of class environments. The category of self-management was also one of the categories that ranked very high in the typical profile of a beginning business student. The area of the ESAP that deals with self-management showed that business students know how to promote a positive approach to the changes around them. This aspect will be very important as students enter the business world where changes must be embraced with an ardent desire to lead an organization forward.

The category that differed between male and female students was the area of intrapersonal skills. In this category, male business students ranked higher than female business students. This category of emotional intelligence measures the goals individuals set for themselves and the ability to motivate themselves towards those goals. This score also depicted how an individual may empathize with another individual on a situation that develops between other people. Since males ranked higher in this category than females, the researchers may hypothesize that males view themselves more positively than females in accomplishing their goals. Males also tend to view themselves in the positions in which they would like to be more than females would. Love (2014) revealed a statistical significance in emotional intelligence and team leadership skills between male and female students in which male students displayed greater team satisfaction and positive relationships with team members than females. Female business students still view themselves positively; however, not as much as males in accomplishing their goals and objectives and viewing themselves in the high-ranking positions they in which they would like to be. Tables 4.1-4.4 show the differences in means and standard deviations between male and female students for Intrapersonal skills, leadership skills, self-management skills, and Interpersonal skills.

Table 4.1

*Descriptive Statistics for Intrapersonal Skills: Intrapersonal Variable*

Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Females	33.97	8.385
Males	36.06	7.683

Table 4.2

*Descriptive Statistics for Leadership Skills: Leadership Skills Variable*

Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Females	35.20	7.506
Males	34.37	7.669

Table 4.3

*Descriptive Statistics for Self-Management Skills: Self-Management Skills Variable*

Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Females	79.4068	16.63856
Males	79.1073	16.06785

Table 4.4

*Descriptive Statistics for Interpersonal Skills: Interpersonal Skills Variable*

Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Females	77.9487	14.53227
Males	76.5087	14.47235

The data indicated that there was a difference in intrapersonal skills between male and female students enrolled in the business freshmen seminar courses. The data also indicated that there were no differences between male and female students in the categories of self-management skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures with descriptive statistics were conducted to determine whether males and females differed on the four categories of Emotional Intelligence assessed: self-management skills, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, and intrapersonal skills. The results of this research project conveyed the following conclusions. The Emotional Intelligence scores of males versus females were different within one category of Emotional Intelligence: the intrapersonal skills category.

Therefore, gender did influence one area within the Emotional Intelligence assessment. The category of Emotional Intelligence in which male students ranked higher than female students was the area of intrapersonal skills. Overall, the typical profile of a beginning business student seems to be one of leadership, self-management, strong interpersonal skills with each other and faculty, and high intrapersonal skills depending on the gender. Beginning business students seem to be prepared for the challenges the upper-division business courses offer for them as well as the corporate world.

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations have been made. It is recommended that more emphasis is placed on the Emotional Intelligence assessments in freshmen seminar courses to help students to understand their strengths versus weaknesses to better prepare for career success and find ways or techniques of handling problematic situations as they arise in their personal as well as academic careers. Female students should be highly encouraged to have a strong positive motivation to reach their goals of obtaining success in high management career areas and envision themselves in those careers. Using examples of women who have strived for and achieved success in the corporate world may help build the motivation and emotional intelligence skills of female college students who are also striving for academic success.

Instructors and advisors should enable students to set clear and measurable goals for themselves and be a part of the students' success at each step of the academic process to serve as a mentor and support for the students. Instructors and advisors may teach appropriate leadership training to students so that students may be aware how their own personal skills may align with those skills researched as effective leadership skills. Love (2014) postulated that "By aligning leader behavior skills to goals and leader performance, developing a strategic perspective to reinforce emotional intelligence skills, and creating faculty leadership training workshops to enhance team collaboration and leader behavior skills" (p. 110), college students would be more apt to acknowledge and develop an understanding of their emotional intelligence skills and its importance to their academic careers and personal lives. University administrations, college faculty, and advisors should take into consideration that students enrolled in freshmen seminar courses are in the exploration stage of their academic careers. Instructors and advisors should strive to be sensitive to the career interests of these students. By taking the Emotional Intelligence survey, students may become acutely aware of their likes and dislikes thus equipping themselves with the vital information they need as they strive to select the career of their interest.

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