Emotional Intelligence
A predictor of performance in a range of GCSE subjects

CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

Trait emotional intelligence affected progress differently across various GCSE subjects considered, and influenced school attainment in certain subjects more than in others. A greater number of emotional intelligence subscales and factors were significantly related to progress in English and English Literature than in other subjects considered. Self-motivation and low impulsivity were significant predictors of progress in almost all subjects. Some subscales were found to have a negative relationship with progress in GCSE Mathematics.

The results presented in this factsheet represent the second phase of Cambridge Assessment's study into emotional intelligence (EI), the first phase of which explored the relationships between trait EI and progress from Key Stage 3 (KS3) to GCSE in six different GCSE science specifications. This second phase looks at the relationship with a wider range of GCSE subjects, namely English, English Literature, Mathematics, Art and Design, Drama and French.

Emotional Intelligence subscales and factors significantly affecting, positively (+) or negatively (-), students' progress from Key Stage 3 to GCSE

Emotional Intelligence Subscales and Factors	English	English Literature	Mathematics	Art and Design	Drama	French
Self-esteem	+	+			+	
Emotion expression			-			
Self-motivation	+	+	+	+	+	
Emotion regulation			+			
Happiness	+	+				
Empathy	+	+				
Social awareness	+		-			
Impulsivity (low)	+	+	+	+	+	+
Emotion perception	+	+			+	
Stress management	+					
Emotion management			-		+	
Optimism	+					
Relationships						
Adaptability					+	
Assertiveness	+					
Wellbeing	+	+				
Self-control	+	+	+		+	
Emotionality	+	+				
Sociability	+		-		+	-
trait EI	+	+			+	

Key findings

- Students taking Mathematics, English or English Literature had, on average, the highest trait EI scores. Students taking Art and Design had the lowest trait EI scores.
- A greater number of the questionnaire subscales and factors were significantly related to progress in English and English Literature than to progress in the other subjects considered.
- The self-motivation and low impulsivity subscales were the most significant and consistent predictors of progress across all subjects.
- The relationships EI subscale was not a significant predictor in any of the GCSE subjects investigated in this phase of the study.
- Some trait EI subscales were negatively associated with academic success. For example, for GCSE Mathematics, students who scored highly on the emotion expression, social awareness and emotion management subscales were likely to achieve less than expected given their KS3 attainment.
- However, the self-motivation, emotion regulation and low impulsivity subscales and the self-control factor had a positive relationship with progress in GCSE Mathematics.
- 60% of students who took GCSE French obtained at least a grade B, reflecting the fact that modern foreign languages are usually taken by relatively high achievers. In GCSE French only the low impulsivity subscale had a significant relationship with progress and the sociability factor had a negative effect.

Mean GCSE attainment

The global trait EI score was a significant predictor of overall performance at GCSE. Most EI subscales and factors (except emotion expression, social awareness, emotion management, adaptability and assertiveness) were predictors of mean GCSE attainment after controlling for prior attainment.

Context of research
"Can trait Emotional Intelligence predict differences in attainment and progress in secondary school?"

Cambridge Assessment undertook this large-scale questionnaire survey of British students aged 14-16 to determine whether performance in different GCSE subjects is associated with candidates' levels of emotional intelligence, after taking into account prior attainment at age 14. Responses to a Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire from almost 2000 OCR science candidates from 31 schools were analysed. The questionnaires were completed prior to the June 2007 examination session and questionnaire scores were later matched to participants' Key Stage 3 results and GCSE grades. The first phase of the research investigated the relationship between trait EI and performance in six different science specifications. A second phase of the study looked at the relationship in a wider range of GCSE subjects taken by the students in the sample. In particular, it addressed subjects such as English, Drama and Art and Design, which might be expected to be more affected by EI.

Further information

Full details of the emotional intelligence work can be found in the full report available at:
www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk

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