CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The severity of the officer shortage in the defense forces has to be reckoned as “national security risk with implications for all”. Because of the rising non-takers for career in the defense, this shortage and the associated threat to quality of security of the nation, is a constant attention of combat leaders in army as it “cannot afford to lose suitable candidates striving” to become officers (Sabharwal 2012). Attrition among the workforce is a national problem recognized by bureaucrats, political leaders, army commanders in military training as a problem associated with the critical officer shortage (Kumar 2012). Three issues surface as major key result area: a) ensuring almost negligible attrition rate in the ‘rank-and-file’ from the existing manpower resources, b) making training and development along with work environment enviable as compared to other careers, c) identifying and addressing the lacunae if any, in the present system.

In essence, new dimensions beyond the traditional avenues have to be factored into the selection / induction process in tandem with training. In the context of the critical officer shortage, cadets perceive trainees are not adequately being prepared in the cognitive and technical aspects of a future combat role. The emotional facet of contemporary soldiering practice and cadets are being overlooked. They are not adequately groomed for the
realities of contemporary combat soldiering (Cadman & Brewer 2001; Freshwater & Stickley 2004).

Decision-making of individuals is a process guided by emotions (Bar-On 2007). Cadets who possess higher emotional intelligence (EI) and motivation to learn might use these skills in the decision-making to persist and complete the training program without harboring thoughts of giving up midway (Jenkins 2006; Van Noord 2007). According to Marion’s (2006) contention, emotionally intelligent students become self-motivated and self-directed learners. Similarly it is expected that cadets with high EI are likely to perform better since they are able to capitalize on their strengths (Grace 2004).

Despite the rising officers shortage in respective arms and services of the army, all societies worldwide rely on the work of these army officers in providing peace. The majority of peace-keeping forces help in maintaining peace in war torn regions or impoverished society (Neethling 2003; Tourangeau et al 2010). Peace conscious leaders worldwide despite their effort expect a shortage of officers (Cutcliffe & Yarbrough 2007). Improving cadet retention is a persistent and complex issue associated with the global officers shortage in respective armies (McLaughlin et al 2008). India is no exception.

1.2 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study portrays a vivid picture about the degree of influence by personal characteristics on the overall academic outcome especially of trainees undergoing a rigorous and tough training programme. In doing so, the research work provides ample information on various factors that are instrumental and vital for peak performance. It also points out the various
benefits which cadets may derive from learning motivation strategies for self-awareness and its inherent limitations. Practitioners, by understanding the mechanism of relationship can effectively moderate their counseling practices for optimum output and behavioral change. Following the relationship practices, teachers can create an interactive environment through greater participation by the students in the discussions. This helps in honing their communication skills as well as improves their confidence in class-rooms. In a nutshell, this study would benefit all concerned within the realm of training and development in general, and academicians in particular, in designing and executing appropriate strategies for training / grooming individuals.

Individual differences have long been a topic of research (Schulenburg 1995). In order to bring about the best from individuals despite these differences, it is essential that one is able to discern the personal characteristics of individuals such that it can be effectively transformed to advantage through training and learning (Arendale 1998; Gold et al 1990) in all spheres of life in general and in the arena of education in particular, thus contributing to the overall economic growth of the nation. Human capital is beginning to be recognized as an enormous potential for the economic growth of a developing nation. Education is the backbone for individual development and progress.

Rapid advances in technology, changing business environment, volatile financial scenarios all point towards one direction, i.e. ability to outwit all such predicaments through employment of better qualified personnel in all organizations who are adept in taking befitting decision during crisis and at critical situations even under extreme stress (Morgeson et al 2007; Ones et al 2007).
Quantitative researchers assume cognition and behavior are predictable and explainable (Johnson & Christensen 2008). EI is a measurable construct gaining interest in the field of education, health care, and leadership (Goleman 2006; Baughan & Smith 2008).

In the working environment of the army, the commanders view that ability to be self-motivated and motivate others as a desirable quality of leaders and followers (Goleman 2006). In nursing education, a major factor perceived by nursing graduates that influences attrition was academic motivation (Higgins 2006; Astin 2005). Nurse educators might be equipped to mould those students who possess lower levels of motivation (Rosenberg et al 2007; Trice & Foster 2008). Motivation was a germane construct appropriate to explore in the training of army cadets.

Army cadet retention exists as a prevalent concern among leaders as it exists in nursing programs. Leaders in nursing programs in the United States (Hopkins 2008) and in other countries (Buchan 2006; Baernholdt & Lang 2007; Newton et al 2007) expressed the critical need to improve nursing student retention (Tinto 2006). Similarly, cadet retention needs to be improved. This can be done by examining their personality and the influence of academic achievement was also found to be an important issue worth investigating.

A paradigm shift is discernible in the training and development arena. Such a change will usher in the awareness towards harvesting individual potential through the utilization of the aforementioned factors.
1.3 RESEARCH AREA

The research questions for the current research study focused on the issues associated with cadets training and the rising national officer shortage. The ongoing problem of improving retention and decreasing attrition of army officers lies in identifying other potential factors influencing the decision by cadets to persist, drop out or withdraw from the training program (Stickney 2008). The emotional intelligence, personality traits, self-esteem and motivation to learn has been found to influence nursing student retention (Moore 2007; VanNoord 2007; Smith et al 2008). The secondary predictor variables (age, gender, income and education) may also influence retention (Wong & Law 2002; Jeffreys 2004; Sutherland 2008). Because the cadets may underestimate the rigorous demands of the military training program, military leaders might monitor retention early in the training program, such as during the first term of the course in trimester program (Higgins 2006; Jeffreys 2007; Leithwood et al 2008).

The study envisages examining the influence of personality, EI and self-esteem on motivation to learn and in turn its impact on academic achievement of cadets undergoing training at the officers training academy. Towards this end in view, the study throws light on the various factors contributing to the relationship between personal characteristics and academic outcome.

The participants were graduates who have chosen to take army as their career. The reason for selecting cadets’ program, as opposed to other types of military programs, stemmed from the need to understand the individuals who get inducted to this demanding career.
The subjects in this study are candidates who have been screened prior to commencement of training by a selection board for their suitability to become commissioned officers on successful completion of training at the Officers Training Academy, Chennai. They follow a tight and rigorous schedule of training that grooms them into shouldering high responsibilities right from day one of their passing out of the academy. Any limitation of the data collected could possibly be due to the scope of the data collected as it pertained to a very narrow and specific population limited to cadets at Chennai, even though similar academy exist elsewhere in India.

1.3.1 Objectives of the Study

The three primary objectives of this study are:

- to study the mediating role of self-esteem on the relationship between EI and motivation to learn,
- to study the mediating role of self-esteem on the relationship between personality traits and motivation to learn, and
- to study the impact of motivation to learn on academic achievement

1.3.2 Assumptions

The findings of the study are based on the responses which may be subject to personal bias. The study has been made in the city of Chennai alone. As such, generalizations of the findings from the study warrant adequate care and caution.

Bias in surveys employing self-report cannot be completely done away with. It is a common feature in many organizational behavior
researches. The respondents have a tendency either to inflate their opinions or have the apprehension that their responses are under scrutiny by the management (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone 2002) and hence try to provide ‘socially desirable’ responses. In an attempt to provide positive connotations to new ideas in the questionnaire ‘acquiescence bias’ may also occur.

1.4 DEFINITION OF VARIABLES

There being varied approaches to any research problems, it is of utmost necessity that the manner in which the study variables have been operationalized must be defined. It also clarifies the posture and the stand taken by the researcher when multiplicity or more than one school of thought co-exists. It is brought out that these definitions derive their sustenance from several deep-rooted theories that have been indicated wherever applicable.

The definition of all the explanatory variables and the criterion along with the sources and the supporting theory as applicable are as given in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Definition of variables

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>‘the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand it and reason with emotion and regulate it in the self and others’</td>
<td>Mayer et al (2000)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>ii</td>
<td>Personality</td>
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<td>(a)</td>
<td>Openness to</td>
<td>described by imagination, intelligence, and curiosity; have positive attitude about learning experiences and new ideas</td>
<td>Costa &amp; McCrae (1992a)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>experience</td>
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<td>(b)</td>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>coping with challenges, stress, or problem solving, ability to reconcile to situations; apply learning in real life</td>
<td>Costa &amp; McCrae (1992a)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Kolb (1984)</td>
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<td>(c)</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>a person’s overall level of adjustment and capacity for resilience and forbearance</td>
<td>Costa &amp; McCrae (1992a)</td>
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<td>Stability</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(d)</td>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>a tendency to be sociable, gregarious, outgoing, warmhearted, and talkative</td>
<td>Lounsbury et al (2005)</td>
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<td>(e)</td>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>described by certain attributes: self-disciplined, dutifulness; and concentration on studying</td>
<td>Costa and McCrae (1992a) Schouwenburg (1995)</td>
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Table 1.1 (Continued)

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<td>iii.</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>An internal phenomenon which activates behavior over a time span, directs it and sustains it. Engaging in a behavior for its own sake or external rewards in accordance with reinforcement contingencies.</td>
<td>Murphy &amp; Alexander (2000); Schunk (2000); Stipek (1998)</td>
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<td>iv.</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>A sense of personal worth</td>
<td>Coopersmith (1967); Baumeister (1993)</td>
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<td>v.</td>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>In this study, the marks obtained at the end of the training based on which the merit list gets prepared was defined as the academic achievement</td>
<td>Academy records</td>
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1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions put forth for this study are:

i. Is there any relationship between EI and self-esteem?
ii. Is there any relationship between self-esteem and motivation to learn?

iii. Is there any relationship between EI and motivation to learn

iv. Does self-esteem mediate the relationship between EI and motivation to learn?

v. Is there any relationship between personality traits and self-esteem?

vi. Is there any relationship between personality traits and motivation to learn?

vii. Is there any mediating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between personality traits and motivation to learn?

viii. Does motivation of cadets have any influence on their academic achievement at the academy?

1.6 CHAPTERIZATION

The thesis is composed of six chapters. Chapter 1 contains the background to the topic along with the importance of the study, research questions, and objectives of the study, assumptions, and limitations.

Chapter 2 highlights the earlier studies in the relevant field by bringing out the salient findings and relationship of variables taken up for the study under diverse contexts and constructs. Based on the extensive literature, empirical evidence and existing research gap, a conceptualized model is put forth for investigation using all the variables under study.

Chapter 3 brings out the research model and the statement of hypotheses followed by development of hypotheses based on extensive literature review and theoretical basis.
Chapter 4 forms the main part of the theses as it spells out the research design, sample size, data collection, choosing appropriate survey methods and suitable instruments for measurement of the predictors and criterion variables. It lays the foundation for statistical tools to be used, arriving at a logical conclusion with the assistance of underlying theory and practice.

Chapter 5 deals with discussions on the findings from the data analysis and the results. The statistical tools used were descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, mediation analysis, independent t-test and ANOVA. Additional analysis by means of Sobel test and Bootstrapping methods are also highlighted. Direct effects, indirect effects and slope test have also been brought out.

Chapter 6 brings out the discussion, recommendations for future research along with the implications for managers and practitioners. It deals with each research question at length and discusses its application. It summarizes the research work and makes suggestions for future research.