

PREDICTORS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG
UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence was one of the paradigms most researched on. It was a wide area and yet the most prevalent frameworks of emotional intelligence would be Mayer and Salovey and Goleman. Mayer and Salovey (1995) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate emotion and emotional feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Whilst Goleman (1995) defined emotional intelligence as comprised of five elements which included self-awareness, ability to manage moods (self-regulation), self-motivation, social awareness (empathy) and social skills such as cooperation and leadership.

This research was set against the background of Malaysian higher education whereby emotional intelligence among students was considered at its infancy stage. It was imperative to understand the role of emotional intelligence in higher education system in Malaysia. In particular, there was a need to find out whether students who perform better academically and who were able to learn with different learning styles were highly emotionally intelligent individuals. As such, this research would utilize Goleman's model of emotional intelligence for the theoretical framework as a basis for any new findings that could contribute to knowledge and theory.

The purpose of the research was to test the relationship and influences of emotional intelligence on students' academic performance, non-cognitive factors such as life satisfaction and stress tolerance, leadership qualities and students' learning styles among the undergraduate students in higher learning institutions. Furthermore, this research aimed to examine the differences between demographic factors and emotional intelligence.

Data were collected from questionnaires prepared to the undergraduate students of two colleges whereby the samples of 300 respondents were selected. The model and data were then tested by using Multiple Regression Analysis. Results from the research showed that there were relationship between emotional intelligence and students' academic performance, non-cognitive factors of life satisfaction and stress tolerance, leadership qualities and students' learning styles. Further to that, it was found that there existed significant differences between emotional intelligence and some of the demographic factors. In summary, this research found that there was a significant element that could be developed to the model which contributed to knowledge and existing theories of emotional intelligence

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised/read this study and that in my opinion it confirms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, as a thesis for the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is submitted in fulfillment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the program and/or exclusion from the award of the degree

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
DEMOAVG	Demographic Average
EI	Emotional Intelligence
EIL	Leadership
EQ-I	Emotional Quotient Inventory
ESA	Self Awareness
GPA	Grade Point Average
IQ	Intelligent Quotient
LEADERAVG	Leadership Qualities Average
LS	Life Satisfaction
LSAVG	Life Satisfaction Average
MEIS	Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale
NEO-PI-R	NEO Personality Inventory
RUC1	Research University College 1
RUC2	Research University College 2
SAAVG	Self Awareness Average
SCtrl	Self Regulation
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SLPI	Student's Leadership Practices Inventory
SMAVG	Self Motivation Average
SOCIALAVG	Social Awareness Average
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
SRAVG	Self Regulation Average
SSAVG	Social Skills Average
ST	Stress Tolerance
STAVG	Stress Tolerance Average
TOTALEIAVG	Total Emotional Intelligence Average
UAE	United Arab Emirates
VARK	Visual, Audio, Read/Write, Kinesthetic
VARKAVG	VARK Average
VIF	Variation Inflation Factor

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Malaysian's education system has come a long way since achieving independence in 1957. Many approaches, plans and strategies had been implemented in order to keep up with the rapid evolution in the education system especially in higher education. Nevertheless, it was reported that 30-40% of students were not employed in the first six months after graduation. This was due to the lack of soft skills of the graduates (Yu, 2013). Furthermore, education and skills training had been highlighted to be paramount in developing a nation's human capital and unity among the different races (Siow & Chang, 2011). It was interesting to note that the National Soft Skills Association mentioned that emotional intelligence of undergraduates was important as emotional intelligence formed the base of competencies that soft skills were built upon (National Soft Skills Association, 2015).

Emotional intelligence was said to improve the academic performance of students (Shaima, Abdullah, Hassane & Sofoh, 2011) and enabled students to harness their leadership skills (Low & Hammett, 2012). Besides that, recent research studies found that understanding oneself's emotions and others would promote life satisfaction (Matthews, Zeidner & Roberts, 2004). People who are more "self-aware" and sensitive to other individuals, were able to manage their lives wisely. Thus, emotional intelligence allowed individuals to train their emotional skills to lead to better, more satisfying and stress free lives.

Goleman (1995) in his infamous book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* claimed that only 20% of a person's success is attributed to Intelligent Quotient (IQ). This was further supported by Sparkman (2008) who stated that IQ was not a strong predictor of success in work or in life. It was found that IQ had little relation with success in life. The major contributors of success would be abilities to control emotions, handle frustration and networking. Further to that, one of the issues raised were students who seemed to perform academically well in their secondary education performed lower than expectations when they entered the higher education level compared to those students who performed at an average level in the secondary schools. This suggested that high IQ and good grades (Sparkman, 2008) might not indicate the success of students in the long run. This was further supported by research done by Saibani, Sabtu, Harun, Wan Mahmood, Muhamad, Wahad & Jahari (2015) that also concurred that success in life did not depend solely on high IQ but also emotional intelligence.

In contrast, emotional intelligence (EI) of students was a better indicator of students performing better in higher education. Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, use, and manage emotions contributed to adaptation in various realms of life (Mayer & Salovey 1995). Meanwhile, Goleman (1998) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to identify and control one's emotions, to use feeling to generate self motivation, to empathize with others and to build good relationship with them.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The lack of soft skills and emotional connectivity at the workplace made it difficult for graduates to survive in the challenging work environment. Furthermore, it was reported that 60% of graduates had poor character, attitude or personality and 55% had poor communication skills (Lim, 2013).

Emotional intelligence has a different perspective from cognitive abilities. As stated by Goleman (1995, p.10) “emotional intelligence was a different way of being smart, distinct from cognitive intelligence. It included capacities of knowing your own feeling, confident about your strengths and weaknesses and using those feelings to make sound decisions. It also included how you manage your moods in order to avoid interference with your goals and tasks at hand. The third component of emotional intelligence is motivation – having an inner sense of what you want to get and why you want to get it, to accept setbacks and frustrations in stride. The fourth capacity of emotional intelligence is empathy, knowing what people around you are feeling, and be able to adapt to their perspective to develop rapport. Last but not least, emotional intelligence included social skills which involved ability to manage emotions and relationships, persuasion to negotiation, cooperation and teamwork.”

According to Daniel Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence was an ability to control emotions and includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Despite the importance of emotional

intelligence in students' academic performance, there was limited local research on this area. Meanwhile, contradicting findings have been reported on the positive influence of students' emotional intelligence on their academic performance. It was found that students with high emotional intelligence scored better in school and were able to manage better their emotions (Petrides, Frederickson & Furnham, 2004, Lam & Kirby, 2010). Meanwhile, contradicting findings by Izzaguire (2008) and Bradshaw (2008) did not find any significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance. Therefore, the current research attempted to fill the gap in the body of Malaysia literature on students' emotional intelligence and its association with academic achievement.

As mentioned, the discussion of emotional intelligence in higher education in Malaysia was relatively new, with limited research on emotional intelligence and students' academic performance and learning in Malaysia. Generally, educators placed more importance on students' GPA (Grade Point Average) to gauge their performances academically and the assumption was that students with high IQ and GPA would perform better. Nevertheless, mixed research results were found on whether emotional intelligence affects the students' academic performance. Petrides, Frederickson & Furnham, (2004), Bar-On (1997), all advocated that emotional intelligence did affect students' academic performance positively.

On the other side of the coin, Bradshaw (2008), Izaguirre, (2008) , Veitch (2011) and Jdtaiwi, Ishak, Taamneh, Gharaibeh & Rababah (2011) all concluded that there was no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and students' academic performance as measured by GPA.

As mentioned earlier, several educators (Petrides, Frederickson & Furnham, 2004, Swartz, 1996) believed that students with high IQ and GPA would perform better academically. While students with high IQ and GPA might generally perform well academically, the true potential of students in academic performance and learning was not gauged. Hence, as some scholars found, there was significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance whilst some found there was no significant relationship between the said variables, there was a need to further explore emotional intelligence and student's academic performance especially in Malaysia in order to explore whether these results could be applicable in the local setting. This was one of the aims of this research.

Besides that, Goleman (1998) stated that the determination of the success of a person might not lie only with the cognitive factors. Emotional intelligence along with non-cognitive factors was sometimes the major factors that influence the success and failure of students. There were some non-cognitive factors (such as life satisfaction and stress tolerance) that posed a strong influence onto students when it came to academic performance and learning styles.

Thus, apart from academic performance, non-cognitive factors (including life satisfaction and stress tolerance) were also influenced by emotional intelligence. It was well documented that adults with high level of emotional intelligence presented better psychological well-being. In other words, highly emotional intelligent people have positive attitude, feelings and moods which subsequently lead to greater life satisfaction (Grace, 2004). Carmeli, Yitzhak-Halevy & Weisberg (2009) found that people with high levels of emotional intelligence were better off psychologically and hence increased their life satisfaction.

Furthermore, emotional intelligence has been linked to stress levels and stress tolerance. Stress tolerance, an ability to understand adverse events and stressful situations without developing physical or emotional symptoms, was affected by emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2008; Bar-On, 1997), indicating that individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence were able to cope better with their stress (Mayer & Salovey, 1990; De Vito, 2009), Gardner & Stough (2002) and McClain, (2009) examined the linkage between emotional intelligence and stress. Based on their research, it was stated that male and female might have different emotional intelligence and stress levels. Therefore, there was a need to examine whether higher emotional intelligence lead to higher level of life satisfaction and lower level of stress among students as it affects adults' life satisfaction and stress. This was the next aim of the research.

Extensive literature provided evidence on the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership qualities in the business world. However, there was little known regarding the influence of emotional intelligence on the qualities in leaders at an earlier stage such as in the undergraduate years of studies. This research also embarked on the relationship between emotional intelligence and students' leadership qualities. As many advocates of leadership theories such as Lewin's leadership styles, Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership over the decades, it was not only vital for organization to find qualified leaders that could overcome any changes and possibilities in the ever evolving business world. Hence, there was a need to see whether certain practices/qualities in leaders could be identified at an earlier stage such as in the undergraduate years of studying.

Emotional intelligence was dependent on one's own feelings, emotions and how to control them. This could be drawn from the fact that emotional intelligence could be a very individualistic character. Drawing from this, demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, students' types (domestic vs. international) and programmes might be moderating variables to emotional intelligence. Hence, it could be said that emotional intelligence was demographic factor-dependent (such as gender, year of study, ethnicity, leisure, time spent on leisure and programmes). Mixed results had been found in the relationship between emotional intelligence and demographic characteristics. Some researchers found that demographic characteristics of age, gender, career choice, ethnicity, year of study and students' leisure have significant relationship and differences with emotional intelligence (Bar-On 1997, Petrides, Furnham & Martin 2004, Yarrish & Law, 2009, Chew, Zain & Hassan, 2013 & Lyusin 2014.).

Meanwhile, some researchers found there were no significant relationship or differences of demographic characteristics with emotional intelligence (Encinas, 2001, Hopikins & Bilimoria 2008, Jacques 2009, Tung 2009). Thus, further examination of this area in the local setting would be one of the aims of this research.

This study further delved into the relationship between emotional intelligence and learning styles. Johnson (2008) used Gregorc Style Delineator to gauge the linkage between emotional intelligence and learning styles and found there is no correlation between them. For this research, VARK learning styles had been used to examine whether there was any relationship between emotional intelligence and learning styles which was the further aim of this research.

According to the literature reviewed, it is imperative for this study to find out whether students' academic performance, non-cognitive factors (i.e. stress tolerance and life satisfaction) and leadership qualities were affected by emotional intelligence. On top of that, the current research aimed to examine the association between students' demographic characteristics and learning style as determinant factors and emotional intelligence as the outcome.

Hence, by looking at the research problem presented in Chapter 1 and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, a research model was developed on the relationship between emotional intelligence and its predictors. The findings of this

research represented the solution or framework model to address the research problem.

1.3 Research Objectives

As mentioned earlier, the importance of conducting this research is to gauge the influence of emotional intelligence of students on factors such as students' academic performance, students' life satisfaction, stress tolerance, leadership and learning styles. The students mentioned here would be the undergraduate students of Research University College 1 (RUC1) and Research University College 2 (RUC2) in their first, second and third year of studies.

Basically there were two main objectives

Research Objective 1 - to examine the relationship of emotional intelligence with factors such as students learning styles, academic performance, and non-cognitive factors such as life satisfaction and stress tolerance and leadership qualities

(a) Research Objective 1.1 - To ascertain the undergraduates profiles of emotional intelligence and students' academic performance and leadership qualities

(b) Research Objective 1.2 - To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and students' academic performance as measured by GPA.

(c) Research Objective 1.3 - To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and students' life satisfaction.

(d) Research Objective 1.4 - To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and students' stress tolerance.

(e) Research Objective 1.5 - To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership qualities

By examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and these factors, the students could have better chances in improving their performances. In order to achieve this research objective, literature review on related theories and theoretical frameworks had been done to develop the conceptual framework.

Research Objective 2 – to examine if there were significant differences between emotional intelligence and demographic characteristics such as gender, college, programmes, local/foreign students, extra-curricular activities, siblings and hobbies; and to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and students' learning styles.

(f) Research Objective 2.1 - To examine the significant difference between demographic characteristics and emotional intelligence.

(g) Research Objective 2.2 - To examine the relationship between students' learning styles and emotional intelligence.

(h) Research Objective 2.3 - To determine the predictor for the relationship between students' academic performance, demographic characteristics, non-cognitive factors, learning styles and leadership qualities with emotional intelligence.