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DETERMINANTS AFFECTING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF OF HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of self-awareness, empathy, and social skills on emotional intelligence (EI) among academic staff at higher education institutions in Malaysia. Focusing on a sample of 367 faculty members directly engaged in teaching and learning, the research aims to assess how these three dimensions contribute to the overall perception and effectiveness of emotional intelligence within the academic context. Through correlational analysis, the study examines the interrelationships among self-awareness, empathy, social skills, and emotional intelligence, yielding insights into their combined effect on academic performance and interpersonal relationships. Data collection is carried out using self-administered questionnaire through simple random sampling. The anticipated findings are expected to inform recommendations for the enhancement of emotional intelligence training programs, the promotion of a supportive teaching atmosphere, and the improvement of student engagement. By gaining a deeper understanding of these dynamics, institutions can better prepare their academic staff to navigate the complexities of educational interactions, ultimately benefiting both educators and students.

Keywords: *Emotional intelligence, Empathy, Social skills, Self-awareness, Academic staff*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in organizational success across various sectors, particularly in higher education institutions where effective communication and collaboration are vital. As these institutions face increasing diversity and rapid changes, EI enables leaders and staff to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, fostering an inclusive environment that supports both academic and personal growth. By enhancing relationships among faculty, staff, and students, EI promotes a culture of empathy and understanding, which is essential for student engagement and retention. Ultimately, institutions that prioritize emotional intelligence are better equipped to create innovative learning experiences and effectively respond to the evolving needs of their communities.

The recent rapid advancements in large AI language models have instilled anxiety in many individuals regarding their future employability. In March 2023, a report by Goldman Sachs said AI could replace 300 million full-time workers, and the World Economic Forum predicted that by 2025, 50% of all workers will need reskilling due to the increasing prevalence of technology. Despite these,

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there is still a silver lining - a domain where humans can continue their lead in the march of progress of machines, and that is emotional intelligence (Mischke, 2023). Students have noted instances where lecturers appear stressed, attributing this to the perceived lack of responses or interactions from students and technology-related issues (Gunasekara et al., 2022). It is surprising to see how some lecturers are oblivious to the challenges faced by students (Kamaludin & Sundarasan, 2023). According to the article by Smith *et al.* (2021), the study demonstrates that teachers' levels of exhaustion at work are rising and becoming an issue, which emphasizes the need for them to improve their emotional intelligence. These can also be seen in our local universities as well whereby because of the growing expectations, standards, and demands from the general public, stakeholders, and the Ministry of Higher Education, the environment at local universities is extremely challenging.

2. Literature Review

In the dynamic and challenging landscape of public universities, academic staff plays a role that extends far beyond simply imparting knowledge. These professionals are responsible for fostering intellectual development, addressing a wide range of student needs, and promoting collaboration with colleagues, all of which require a high level of emotional intelligence (EI). Given the unique demands of their profession, academic staff needs a thorough understanding of the factors that shape their emotional intelligence. This study explores three key elements - self-awareness, empathy, and social skills - that influence EI and their practical relevance within public universities.

2.1 Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in personal and professional success, influencing leadership capabilities, teamwork, and overall mental well-being (Khan et al., 2023). By fostering emotional intelligence, individuals can enhance their relationships, navigate social complexities, and improve their resilience in challenging situations (Smith & Jones, 2024). Goleman (1998) defined emotional intelligence as the capacity to recognize, manage, and harness the strength and sensitivity of emotions as a means of influencing behaviour in people. An individual with high emotional intelligence will be driven to take positive action and prioritize achieving their goals within the organization.

In the realm of academia, Daniel Goleman's key competencies of **self-awareness**, **empathy**, and **social skills** play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of educators and fostering a positive learning environment. **Self-awareness** enables academicians to recognize their own emotional states, biases, and triggers, which is essential for reflective teaching practices and personal growth (Goleman, 1995). This awareness helps educators manage their emotional responses, thereby improving interactions with students and colleagues. **Empathy** is vital for understanding and addressing the diverse emotional needs of students, allowing educators to create a supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere (Goleman, 1995). By connecting with students on an emotional level, faculty can better facilitate learning and engagement. Additionally, strong **social skills** are necessary for effective communication and collaboration, enabling academicians to build relationships, resolve conflicts, and foster a sense of community within their institutions (Goleman, 1998). Together, these competencies contribute significantly to an emotionally intelligent academic environment, ultimately enhancing student outcomes and faculty satisfaction.

2.2 Empathy

Empathy is the ability to sense other people's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling, which is a crucial aspect of emotional intelligence. It involves understanding and sharing the feelings of another person, encompassing both cognitive and emotional dimensions (Smith & Jones, 2024). As a core component of emotional intelligence (EI), empathy enables individuals to navigate social complexities and respond to the emotional needs of others, thereby fostering stronger connections and collaboration. Emotional intelligence and empathy are closely intertwined, with empathy being a crucial component of emotional intelligence,

particularly in interpersonal situations where skills like emotion regulation and social competence are important. Empathy is another fundamental component of EI that significantly impacts student-faculty relationships. Academicians who cultivate empathy can better understand the emotional and academic challenges their students face, fostering a supportive and inclusive classroom environment (Sharma et al., 2022). This empathetic approach is particularly important in diverse educational settings, where students may experience unique obstacles related to their backgrounds and experiences (Gómez et al., 2022).

2.3 Social Skills

Social skills play a crucial role in emotional intelligence (EI), particularly for academic staff who regularly engage with students, colleagues, and administrators. Skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution, collaboration, and relationship management fall under the umbrella of social skills. These abilities are vital for enhancing the learning environment, fostering teamwork, and improving the educational experience. The key components of social skills include the ability to build meaningful interpersonal relationships, recognize well-being, achieve goals without obstacles, and communicate effectively with others. Moreover, social skills are essential for collaboration and conflict resolution among faculty members. Academicians with high EI can effectively communicate and build positive relationships with colleagues, which is crucial for successful teamwork in research and administrative tasks (Serrat, 2020). These social skills enable faculty to create a collegial atmosphere that promotes interdisciplinary collaboration and enhances overall institutional effectiveness. Additionally, Pranata et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of social skills, emphasizing their crucial role in fostering effective collaboration and strong relationships among students, both in the classroom and during broader school activities. Identifying areas where social skills can be enhanced can guide educators in creating a more collaborative learning environment.

2.4 Self-awareness

Self-awareness in the context of emotional intelligence is defined as "the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values, and how they influence behaviour" (Goleman, 1998). It involves becoming consciously aware of one's feelings and emotions, as well as having a clear perception of one's personality, including strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, beliefs, motives, and feelings (Carden et al., 2022). This understanding of self is essential for developing emotional consciousness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence, which are foundational for effective emotional intelligence. Educational institutions can greatly benefit from the recommendations provided by a study on self-awareness abilities through social and emotional intelligence learning methods. The study's findings suggest that structured social-emotional learning can effectively enhance students' self-awareness in high school environments (Thaintheerasombat & Chookhampaeng, 2022). Additionally, research by Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) emphasized that self-awareness is a crucial aspect of emotional intelligence for school leaders. It allows them to recognize their emotions, understand their effects, and manage their responses effectively. Leaders with strong self-awareness are better equipped to handle stress, make sound decisions, maintain relationships, and build trust, ultimately fostering a positive school climate.

3. Methodology

This study focuses on the academic staff at a higher education institution (HEI) in Malaysia, namely Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) because they are among the academic staff who are active in teaching and learning activities. Participants are emailed to get their feedback to study emotional intelligence. Their email address is obtained from the UiTM Registrar's Department. The main goal is to evaluate the perceptions of emotional intelligence among these academic staff and to investigate the connections between self-awareness, empathy, social skills, and emotional intelligence. The target population includes 8,932 individuals, and according to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a minimum sample size of 367 is necessary. However, it is anticipated that data will be gathered from

147 participants, which accounts for 40% of the required sample size. This response rate is in line with Vanderleest (1996) and will be deemed satisfactory. Moreover, Roscoe (1975) indicates that a sample size ranging from 30 to 500 is suitable for most studies. Data collection will be carried out using self-administered questionnaire through simple random sampling. Participants will be assured that their responses are confidential, and it will be emphasized that there are no right or wrong answers. It is expected that 147 completed questionnaires will be suitable for analysis. Established measures from prior studies will be employed, including the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) by Wong and Law (2002) for assessing emotional intelligence, the Hogan Empathy Scale by Greif and Hogan (1973), the Social Skills Rating System by Gresham and Elliott (1990) for social skills and the self-awareness scale by Fenigstein et al. (1975). To ensure internal consistency, the reliability of each construct will be evaluated. Since these constructs have not been previously studied at this institution across various faculties and levels, the emphasis will be on establishing internal consistency, which reflects how interrelated the items within each construct are. Cronbach's alpha coefficient will be used for this assessment, with Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) suggesting that values above 0.7 indicate good internal consistency. Items that fall below this threshold will be excluded to enhance construct reliability. Additionally, Pearson's Correlation will be conducted to examine the relationships between the variables and significant associations are anticipated between self-awareness, empathy, social skills, and emotional intelligence among academic staff at Malaysian universities.

4. Conclusion

This research aims to examine how academic staff perceive emotional intelligence, especially within public higher education institutions. By employing correlational analysis, the study will investigate the impact of self-awareness, empathy, and social skills on emotional intelligence. The results will inform recommendations designed to address the implications for academic staff, students, the institution, society and nation. Despite the benefits of EI, challenges remain in its development among academicians. Traditional academic environments often prioritize cognitive skills and research output over emotional competencies, which can hinder the cultivation of EI (Wang et al., 2022). To address this gap, higher education institutions can implement training programs focused on emotional intelligence, such as workshops and mentorship initiatives, to help faculty enhance their EI skills (Rivers et al., 2022). In summary, emotional intelligence is a vital asset for academicians in higher education, impacting teaching effectiveness, student engagement, collaboration, and institutional culture. By prioritizing the development of EI, higher education institutions can create a more supportive and effective learning environment that benefits both faculty and students.

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