Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND STUDENTS' STRESS AMONG CHINESE NATIONALS WHO ARE STUDYING IN UNIMAS

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Bachelor of Science with Honours
(Cognitive Science)
2015
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND STUDENTS' STRESS AMONG CHINESE NATIONALS WHO ARE STUDYING IN UNIMAS

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This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Bachelor of Sciences with Honours (Cognitive Science)

Faculty Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
2015
The project entitled ‘The relationship between emotional intelligence and students’ stress among Chinese nationals who are studying in UNIMAS’ was prepared by Kho Ying Hui and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Cognitive Science)

Received for examination by:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr Fitri Suraya Mohamad)

Date: 14 Jan 2016

Grade A-
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would sincerely like to thank my supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fitri Suraya Mohamad who has provided me with constant support and guidance throughout my final year project. She continually and convincingly conveyed a spirit of adventure in regard to research and excitement in regard to teaching. Without her guidance and persistent help, this project paper would not have been possible.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all informants who had taken part in my final year project, I appreciate you for all the responses you made on the provided instruments. All of the information given are precious and very much appreciated.

This journey would not have been possible without the support of my family and my friends. In particular I would like to thank my mum and dad who have supported me in many ways throughout my studies and I could never have gotten this far without you – you have both been an amazing source of strength for me and the completion of this project paper is dedicated entirely to you both.

I would also like to convey my heartiest appreciation for the assistance from my fellow friends. Thank you for listening to me, encouraging me, sharing the knowledge with me, which helped me a lot during the preparation of this paper.

Again, thank you very much to all of the people who have assisted me in accomplishing the project.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................. vi

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................ viii

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................ 16

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY .................................................................................. 26

CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS ................................................................................................. 45

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION ......................................................... 66

REFERENCES ..................................................................................................................... 76

APPENDIX QUESTIONNAIRE ......................................................................................... 86
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study.................................................................7
Figure 2 Formula for calculating Sample Size...............................................................22
Figure 3 Formula for Calculating Correction for Finite Population............................22
Figure 4 Sample Size Calculation................................................................................23
Figure 5 Distribution of Participants by Gender............................................................38
Figure 6 Distribution of Participants by Age.................................................................39
Figure 7 Distribution of Participants by Faculty............................................................41
Figure 8 Distribution of Participants by Year.................................................................42
Figure 9 Distribution of Participants by Causes of stress...............................................44
Figure 10 Participants' Emotional Intelligence Clusters..................................................44
Figure 11 Participants' Stress Level................................................................................44
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Layout of Questionnaire ............................................................. 24
Table 2 Likert Scale Interpretation ............................................................ 25
Table 3 Total Score of the Four Clusters of Emotional Intelligence .......... 26
Table 4 Case Processing Summary for Cronbach Alpha ......................... 30
Table 5 Reliability Statistics for Cronbach Alpha .................................. 32
Table 6 Item-Total Statistics for Cronbach Alpha .................................. 32
Table 7 Data Analysis Framework .......................................................... 34
Table 8 Summary of Hypothesis testing .................................................. 36
Table 9 Distribution of Participants by Gender ....................................... 36
Table 10 Distribution of Participants by Age ......................................... 37
Table 11 Distribution of Participants by Faculty ..................................... 39
Table 12 Distribution of Participants by Study Year .............................. 40
Table 13 Distribution of Participants by causes of stress ....................... 42
Table 14 Degree of Clusters of Emotional Intelligence ........................... 43
Table 15 Percentage of Participants’ Emotional Intelligence Clusters ....... 45
Table 16 Level of Stress ................................................................. 46
Table 17 Participants’ Stress level .......................................................... 47
Table 18 Relationship between Self-Awareness and Students’ Stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS ....................... 48
Table 19 Relationship between Self-Management and Students’ Stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS ............... 49
Table 20 Relationship between Social Awareness and Students’ Stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS ............... 50
Table 21 Relationship between Relationship Management and Students’ Stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS ............... 51
Table 22 Mean and Standard Deviation for Gender in comparison with Stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS…………………………………………………………..52

Table 23 Independent T-Test for Students’ Stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS based on Gender…………………………………………………………..53

Table 24 Finding of Hypothesis by using Pearson’s Correlation Test………………….53

Table 25 Finding of Hypothesis by using Independent Samples T-Test………………….53
ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence has been highlighted as an important theoretical and practical construct. It has the potential to enable individuals to cope better and experience less stress. The purpose of the study was to understand and analyze the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Students’ Stress among Chinese Nationals who are studying in UNIMAS. Questionnaires were used as the instrument to collect data. Participants were selected by sample size calculation and a total of 74 sets of questionnaires were valid and analyzed. A correlational research design was employed. The independent variables consist of the four clusters of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, and relationship management) and gender, while the dependent variable was the students’ stress. Descriptive analysis was used to explain the distribution of demographic details such as gender, age, faculty, year of study and causes of stress. Statistical inferential analysis was used to explain the results of hypotheses and relationship found between tested variables. Pearson Correlation test and Independent t-test were employed to test the hypotheses. Findings of this research revealed that significant relationships exist for self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, and relationship management with students’ stress. Meanwhile, it was also focused that there is no significant difference between gender of male and female student’s stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying in UNIMAS. Limitations and recommendations were highlighted to provide guidelines for future research.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Stress, Chinese National Students
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

An emotion is a strong feeling of mental and physiological origin from one's surroundings, mood or relationships with others as differentiated from cognitive and volitional states of consciousness (Solomon, 2003). According to Vassiliev (2011), emotions are usually directed towards a certain phenomenon, as it is a personal reaction which rises from a person's subconscious resulting in both physical and behavioral change.

Mostly, emotions can be linked to identity, disposition and mood. In a person's character, emotions contribute such an important part in which it could affect a human's disposition unconsciously through way of thinking and also the way of acting. A few examples of emotions would be pleasure, sadness, love, hate, fear, anger and so forth.

Batson, Shaw and Oleson (1992) stated that the human experience would turn out to be a neutral grey if it lacks the preferences brought upon by positive or negative influences. For instance, humans who become uninterested on the happenings of their surroundings would show no different from a computer, cold and emotionless. So, basically human cannot run away from emotions in daily life. Every human being can feel the world and the situation that they will go through in life because they have emotions. According to Goleman (1995), human feelings take part as much as and often more than human thoughts when doing judgment and action.
Conceptualized as an emotion-related cognitive ability, emotional intelligence (EI) can be understood as the ability to recognize and utilize emotions. Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 189) defined emotional intelligence as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions". The reality shows that emotional intelligence (EI) is the significant reason in influencing human's task performance in numerous terms. Intelligence can become nothing when emotions are in power and emotional intelligence undoubtedly makes human complete.

Pressure and stress exist in everyday life. This happens when an individual cannot deal with the accumulated feelings and would thus perceive the result as stress. Humans cannot avoid stress, but humans should learn how to manage it. Human experiences stress all the time, which might become harmful if stress overwhelms or obstructs the human ability to get on with normal life for too long, or, it will help to motivate to finish or improve a task. For example, even good students faces stress with the heavy loads of homework, assignments and even examinations in their daily life when they lose the ability to control or manage their own feelings.

Meanwhile, students' stress management indicates one's potential ability and performance in terms of how they are controlled and managed. In this study, it is based on the measurement of perceived stress scale. According to Goleman (1998), humans are judged with the new dimension not only with regards to intellectual aspect, but how an individual distribute themself and others too.
The purpose of this research is to identify the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and students' stress management among the undergraduates of Faculty Cognitive Science and Human Development (FCSHD) in University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

Background of study

Throughout the past decade, many researches have been running on emotional intelligence and its relationship to individual performance and productivity. Throughout these years, several studies have been conducted to obtain a better understanding about emotional intelligence (EI). Salovey et al. (2000) stated that emotional intelligence will influence an individual ability to cope. The use of social support and avoidance of reflection have been rising which is an important part of the hierarchy of emotional competencies that ease coping through improving emotional distance and awareness. The pyramid of emotional competencies consist of three levels, basic emotional skills (first level), followed by emotions analysis (second level), and regulating emotions (third level). All three elements are very important as they play a part in determining the effective coping of stress (Salovey et al., 2000). Matthews, Zeidner and Roberts (2000) also suggested that maladaptive coping could become prevalent if complications exist when dealing and adjusting with said emotions, resulting in what we call low emotional intelligence.

Folkman and Lazarus (as cited in Cooper & Payne, 1988) determined eight different ways for an individual to cope with stressful events which includes confront, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-
avoidance, planned problem-solving and positive reappraisal. The emotional state is important in reducing emotional distress before the effectiveness of the coping ability takes place (Johnston and Wallace, 1990).

Slaski and Cartwright (2002) used the Bar-On EQ-I to investigate the relationship between health, performance and emotional intelligence among retail managers. Less psychological strain and lower levels of stress were detected in those participants who owned the higher level of emotional intelligence compared to their lower levels of emotional intelligence counterparts. There is a possibility that a higher level of emotional intelligence would strengthen an individual’s resilience to stress in the workplace.

Another study between the relationship of stress and mental health highlighted specific dimensions of EI which were measured using factors of depression, hopelessness and suicide prone thoughts (Ciarrochi, Deane and Anderson, 2002). The writers surveyed that people can avoid harmful effects of stress by those who have the capability to control one’s own emotions as well as others. Participants with low emotional perception would not realize the contrary influence of stress because they are more likely to curb or neglect their feelings. Carriochi et al. (2002) stated that those who are more emotionally perceptive will be wedged by stress more. This is because, even though emotional perception does not show a direct relationship with stress or mental health, it acts as a moderating agent between stress and negatives such as depression and suicide ideation.

Problem Statement

There have been several past researches carried out at a few foreign countries to investigate the relationship of emotional intelligence in managing stress with other
variables. It is found out that there seemed to be a lack of study which focus solely just on the relationship between emotional intelligence and students' stress management. Therefore, this is a gap that will be addressed in this study which will be situated in a local content in Malaysia. Specifically on international students who are studying at a public University in Malaysia. The stress management of undergraduate students is investigated by evaluating the student’s stress level. Stress in the perspective of students normally comes from study conditions, personal factors and economic conditions with a few examples such as taking final exams, trying to build a social life, financial management between college fees and daily expenses. The different year and different degree programs of study are predicted to influence the stress level of undergraduate students. On the other hand, many Chinese national undergraduates whom are away from their homeland will miss their family which would result in the lack of support directly from their families. This includes academic workload factors such as time management which are often quoted as the main causes of stress among students.

Every year, UNIMAS also offers undergraduate degree programs for international students such as international economics, industrial economics, marketing, finance and so on. According to the UNIMAS webpage, there are entry conditions for international students in which they are required to achieve certain levels of academic performances and standardized levels in the relevant subjects and extra-curricular activities, as well as a concrete aptitude score.

As discussed by Bayer and Bowden (as cited in Petrides, Furnham, & Martin, 2004), studying self-perceived attributes and capacities are important in understanding the self-fulfilling predictions, achievements, aspirations, and psychological well-being. A
person’s self-evaluation provides them with the ability to gain an insight in their own abilities and intelligence. Thus, the aim of conducting this research is to investigate how different is the four competencies of emotional intelligence (EI) affect students’ stress.

Objective of study

General Objective

This study aims to identify the relationship between the four component of emotional intelligence level and students’ stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.

Specific Objective

I. To identify the relationship between self-awareness and students’ stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.

II. To identify the relationship between self-management and students’ stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.

III. To identify the relationship between social awareness and students’ stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.

IV. To identify the relationship between relationship management and students’ stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.

V. To identify the difference between gender of male and female students’ stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.
**Research Question**

What are the categories of emotional intelligence? How students managing stress?

Is there any relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and students' stress?

**Research Hypotheses**

There are five hypotheses tested in this research:

H₁: There is no significant relationship between self-awareness and students' stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.

H₂: There is no significant relationship between self-management and students' stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.

H₃: There is no significant relationship between social awareness and students' stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.

H₄: There is no significant relationship between relationship management and students' stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.

H₅: There is no significant difference between gender of male and female students' stress among the Chinese nationals who are studying at UNIMAS.
1.3 Conceptual framework

Figure 1 shows the relationship between the two variables used in this research. Variable 1 is emotional intelligence (EI) which include the four clusters from its personal (self-awareness and self-management), social competencies (social awareness and relationship management) and gender. Variable 2 is the students’ stress.

![Figure 1: Conceptual Framework](image)

- **Independent Variables**
  - Emotional Intelligence
    - Clusters Self-Awareness
      1. Self-Awareness
      2. Self-Management
      3. Social Awareness
      4. Relationship Management

- **Demographic Factors**
  1. Gender

(Source: Goleman, Boyatzis and McKeen, 2002)
Definitions of Key Terms

The definitions of terminologies that are recommended by earlier researchers are clarified as follows:

**Emotional Intelligence**

*Conceptual Definition*

Humans are constantly striving to learn to balance their emotions. An emotionally intelligent person will be able to excel in four scopes which are identifying, understanding, using and managing emotions (Goleman, 1998). For someone who knows themselves well, they are able to manage themselves effectively in any circumstances. According to Fernandez-Berrocal, Salovey, Vera, Extremera, & Ramos (2005), the capacity classified by psychologist under the term emotional intelligence are people distinguished from their surroundings, has great ability dealing in their community and the professional environment with their preferred level of physical and mental health. In the beginning, the topics of IQ are more popular than EI. Danial Goleman’s first bestselling book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, defined that emotional intelligence is powerful and occasionally even more powerful than IQ (Rhodes, 2008). Emotional intelligence measured within working performance holds some valuable lessons as people attempts to design more effective educational programs (Goleman, 1995).

Mayer and Salovey (1993) defined emotional intelligence as a constitute of social intelligence that distinguishes the human ability to control one’s own emotions as well as the feeling others and feeling to lead one’s thought and act. Goleman (as cited in Nunes,
2003) defined emotional intelligence as “the capacity for recognizing own feelings and others’, for motivating and managing emotions well in relationships” (p.2).

The level of emotional intelligence can be learnt and/or improved. No matter what challenges that are faced by an individual, he or she can stay balanced and focused with emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence can be enhanced by human everyday life experiences. Besides that, an individual with culture and beliefs might also have the advantage in the learning process which will affect one’s emotional intelligence. Previous studies have pointed out that the awareness in the quality of life as well as the subjective quality of life based on an individual’s cultural and beliefs with regards to the balance of both positive and negative emotions in a person which will then influence their overall emotions (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998).

According to Gohm et al. (2005), forecasting and manipulation of feelings enables an individual to know someone’s emotions and what emotion to expect while such knowledge also showed that agony is regular, natural, and provisional in one’s current circumstances. Additionally, since the state of mind simplifies specific kinds of thinking (Clore et al., 2001; Gasper & Clore, 2002), it is under favorable circumstances that requires the guidance needed in order to better comprehend the situation and to control (less stress) higher feelings so that it may be able to simplify the kind of thoughts. Thus, this research will investigate based on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management, the four main clusters of emotional intelligence by Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002).
Operational Definition

In this study, emotional intelligence is defined as an ability to recognize and manage feelings, attitudes and moods by students.

Self-Awareness

Conceptual Definition

Self-awareness can be understood as the capability of a human being in recognizing and understanding his or her own emotions, preferences, resources and perceptions and the way it affect one’s own decision (Goleman et al., 2002). An individual would be more responsible and realistic if they have the characteristic of self-awareness in which they tend to be more sensible and talented in recognizing oneself. There are three methods of recognition within the context of self-personal competence listed in the clusters which are emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence (Goleman et al., 2002).

Operational Definition

Self-awareness describes a students’ ability in recognizing and labeling their personal moods and emotions.

Self-Management

Conceptual Definition

According to Goleman et al. (2002), the ability of each individual to capitalize on their emotions, resources and motivation in order to achieve their goals can be understood as self-management. Individuals who are good in self-management are capable of handling their emotions in a predominant way in order to prevent it from getting in their way while trying to accomplish their goals. There are six regulations of self-personal
competence in the cluster which is emotional self-control, trustworthiness, adaptability, achievement, initiative and conscientiousness (Goleman et al., 2002).

**Operational Definition**

Self-management is defined as the ability of students to adjust their feelings within themselves so that it supports them, which acts as a substitute from obstructing them in acquiring their ultimate point.

**Social Awareness**

*Conceptual Definition*

Social awareness is the capacity of being conscious of others’ emotions, demands, interests and comprehending social networks (Goleman et al., 2002). Human can realise this capability in some approach in which they would like to care for others and help them in probable ways while the aid would produce durable combination within the relationships between people. There are three recognition of other special competence in the cluster which is empathy, service orientation and organizational awareness (Goleman et al., 2002).

*Operational Definition*

Social awareness is described as students’ ability to show empathy for other people. Empathy is a feeling that students felt are in a similar circumstance with others and thus, they know how to feel for others. They believe that other people deserve to be treated with compassion.
Relationship Management

*Conceptual Definition*

Relationship management is the ability of an individual in distributing with the emotions of others relationship, while motivating and encouraging others to accomplish predictable results (Goleman et al., 2002). Relationship management lead people to go on the right pathway to attain achievements in a conscientious and courteous way. The seven regulation of other special competence in the cluster are developing others, influence, conflict management, teamwork and collaboration, inspirational leadership, building bonds and change catalyst (Goleman et al., 2002).

*Operational Definition*

In this research, relationship management is determined as students’ ability of handling emotions when in the communication process.

Stress Management

*Conceptual Definition*

Stress is a physical, mental and emotional response to perceive threat. Stress can be a positive influence as it can help an individual to focus on critical needs as well as stimulate the process of learning. Conversely, intense stress with a short duration can be considered as beneficial. According to Smith, Melinda, Ellen Jaffe-Grill, and Robert Segal (n.d), stress management allows an individual to take charge of his or her own views, emotions, plans and methods when it comes to dealing with various problems.

According to Pike (2003), stress is observed by researchers as an internal requirement that surpasses individual resources. However, coping is viewed as the focal point of psychological strength. On the other hand, increased nervousness and
apprehension corrodes the psychological capabilities, exceeding a moderate level (Strümpfer, 2003). Anguish not only wears away the psychological capabilities but also reduces people’s emotional intelligence (Yang & Gu, 2007).

**Operational Definition**

Stress is defined as the pressure or tensions that are faced by students.

**Significance of the study**

The initial founder of the term “Emotional Intelligence” was by Goleman (1995). Since then, many other researchers have been analyzing the term based on various different concepts, elements, clusters and domains. Psychologists all over the world were intrigued to investigate on the importance of emotional intelligence in improving an individual’s level of achievement. Since emotional intelligence has been widely acknowledged, it explains the purpose of this research to further investigate on the existence of relationship between emotional intelligence and student stress. From the study, there is information which can help to reduce myths or bias on this topic.

In the past, there are many research which deals with the level of stress among workers but none on students’ stress level. The findings of this study seek to address the question on how the level of students’ stress is related with the different levels of emotional intelligence. This allows students to evaluate themselves through the emotional intelligence test and will possibly learn how to observe their own emotions better. Students need to realize how emotions are capable of affecting their lifestyle, personality and behavior. Lastly, it provides a positive light on emotional intelligence, as a misunderstanding of the process could led to negative self-evaluations which are
inaccurate, diminished self-confidence and judgments plagued by stereotypes on the properties and capabilities of other people.

**Limitation of Study**

There are several limitations which have been identified in this whole research. First of all, this research only focuses on the desired factors with relations to students' stress within the four clusters of emotional intelligence. There might be other factors which can be related to the influence to student’s stress. Most of the previous studies focused on relationship between emotional intelligence and workers or employees’ stress management, there is a lack of past research towards students. There were only few of them. So, this research will investigate the relationship between the four clusters of emotional intelligence and students’ stress management.

Next, this research target is only done in one specific location which is University Sarawak Malaysia (UNIMAS). Due to most of the studies which were executed abroad, this research might face poor support or evidence due to limited samples chosen is from the Chinese nationals undergraduate. Other than that, the time for questionnaire distribution and data collection is limited to less than half year.

On the other hand, this study is a quantitative study in which data collection will be processed by analyzing questionnaires. The results might not be reliability and validity because it might contain elements of biasness or cheating when participants are answering the questionnaires.