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Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Social Support among Service Sector Employees

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to determine whether perceived social support affects Emotional Intelligence. The hypothesis that is intended to be proven here is that Emotional Intelligence can be used to measure mental wellness in individuals. Emotional intelligence is said to have two main dimensions that is one of personal competence and the other that of social competence. Perceived social support has been accepted as support from family, friends, and significant others. Emotional Intelligence is important because it helps individuals regulate the overflow of emotional energy welling within oneself and helps others around them cope with those overflowing emotions; hence, this study is perceived as beneficial. This study targets the service sector employees as the sector faces a diverse variety of challenges emanating from the global pandemic. 536 responses were taken, and PLS-SEM was used and applied to analyze and test out the hypotheses. The results showed that social support affects both personal and social competencies. However, in the final analysis, perceived social support turned out to have a stronger influence on personal competency.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; social support; personal competence; social competence; service sector

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1.0 Introduction

Research on emotional intelligence has seen rising emphasis lately (Coetzee & Harry, 2014; Prentice et al., 2019; Sony & Mekoth, 2016). Emotional intelligence uses one's faculties to pinpoint, detect, and comprehend the welled up emotive forces and uses it to manage the resulting emotions arising from that place in a positive mode so as to be able to relieve the stresses and strains that it creates, communicate them effectively, provides a measure of empathy to others, overcome obstacles and challenges, and diffuse conflicts in a wholesome and rational manner. It impacts all the multi-variegated and polychromatic aspects of human beings' daily endeavours, such as the different ways in which people behave and in the way they interact with one another. An individual with a highly developed state of emotional intelligence is easily able to recognize the nature and state of his own emotions and the nature and state of the emotions of others and also possesses the ability to engage with them in a cohesive, efficient, effective and timely manner. A high level of emotional intelligence can help form a deeper and more meaningful relationship with others, achieve a greater degree of success at work, and lead a more fulfilling and nurturing life (Elsherif & Elgafaar, 2021).

The essence of emotional intelligence is extracted from a comprehensive understanding of the state of one's own ingrained emotions and abilities (personal competence) and also a close and not superficial understanding of the state of emotions and abilities of those

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people proximately surrounding them, for example at the workplace (social competence). A higher sense of emotional intelligence can be developed and cultivated through effort and training by navigating and analyzing the emotions that govern us, gaining self-awareness, and learning how best to motivate oneself and others under the given set circumstances they find themselves under. Emotions, feelings, and moods (popularly known as affective factors) have been recognized not only as universal in regulating and directing human behaviour but also directly relate to individual and organizational well-being, performance and job satisfaction.

Personal competence can be further understood from three individual facets; firstly, from a sense of self-awareness, secondly from a sense of self-regulation and thirdly from a sense of self-motivation. Personal competence refers to the individual's ability to believe in him or herself, their known capabilities, their values and standards and helps them discover and determine what is best for themselves or their co-workers. Self-Awareness is defined by a person's sense of genuineness (authenticity) and honesty (integrity). Self-Regulation is the ability of the individual to recognize how and where he or she would fit into the organization, and Self-Motivation is the internal energy that forms the driving force behind individuals. Meanwhile, that sense of social competence mainly focuses on the existence of both the sense of social awareness and those social skills (Osland et al., 2006). The importance of that sense of social competence in the work environment is crucial because, in some organizations, the sense of teamwork is an integral part of its infrastructure. In the service sector, the sense of social competence is of special importance.

The service sector needs employees with high emotional intelligence as this sector is often fraught with interpersonal friction and conflict. In service sector jobs, having high emotional intelligence positively affects task performance when dealing with customers. The need for a degree of emotional intelligence on the employees in the services sector cannot be overemphasized. This need gets accentuated during times of crisis when there is higher attendant tension and stress (Sinha, 2016).

Emotional intelligence has acquired a significant degree of prominence as its enhancement more often than not leads to better mental health. Mental health and wellness have been upscaled to the forefront of important research, especially since late 2019, because of the disastrous nature and effects of the current global pandemic. Psychoanalysts, psychologists and mental health professionals predict the obvious outcome of the pandemic as most likely to impact the state of the mental health of a sizeable population of the globe with an increasing tendency towards higher cases of attempting suicides, undergoing morbid depression and attempting to inflict self-harm (Li et al., 2020; Moukaddam & Shah, 2020; Yao et al., 2020). People who have better emotional intelligence would be better able to work with greater efficiency, experience and undergo more positive rather than negative emotions, create positivity in their associations with others, and face daily challenges in ways that enhance well-being, meaningful commitment, and work fulfilment (Benevene et al., 2018a, b; Santisi et al., 2014; Zeidner et al., 2012). In other words, the heightened sense of emotional intelligence tends to equate itself with a better sense of mental health and balance.

As emotional intelligence focuses on emotions acting within oneself when dealing and interacting with people surrounding oneself, this study focuses on how social support affects emotional intelligence. Social support is the broader concept constituting both the individual's wider social structure and the precise functions the individual serves in his/her varied interpersonal relationships (Grey et al., 2018). The sense of this social support refers to the range of feelings that are reimagined, which it brings about and the actualization by that person of the feeling of being cared for and loved, the support which is available and given so freely to others and the ultimate feeling of being an integral part of a social structure and support group. These supportive resources are predicated on being emotional, real (concrete), revealing, enlightening, social, and intangible. Social support can be sensed and measured by the perceptions that individuals have about the aid/support offered, the help they actually received, or the degree/level at which the person is integrated into the fabric of the existing social networks. Significant other, family and friends presumably pursue social support.

To reiterate, this study focuses on how the sense of perceived social support impacts the emotional intelligence among service sector employees.

2.0 Literature Review

Many reasons explain the fast-spreading and widely disseminating usage of the term emotional intelligence in the professional fields. The more prominent ones that the professionals always uphold and believe in are the paramount importance and the relevance of the sense of emotions and feelings, which equates with that the positive outcomes of work. Goleman (1998), presumably the founder of this concept, asserts that the emotional intelligence is two times as important as the possession of technical skills and even more important than an individual's Intelligent Quotient in predicting positive outcomes at the workplace, suggesting that people should be judged not according to their levels of intelligence or professional competence, but rather by their behavioural attitudes toward themselves and towards others. Modernization and advanced Western societies have always focussed much of their attention on individuals' rationality and emphasized the cognitive dimensions of people's thoughts and behaviours over their relational, social and emotional counterparts (Scheff, 2014).

Emotional intelligence in the working environment would increase productivity and efficiency and improve the workers' overall well-being, job motivation, and job satisfaction. This study is timely as most if not all workers have experienced and are experiencing the changing nature in the way their work is going to be carried out, involving an increase or a reduction in their working hours, alterations in their job tasks and times, and the initial inertia stemming from the unfamiliar transition towards smart working and adaptability. In other words, many working sectors have reorganized their environments and structures to accommodate these newly arising fast emerging demands. These factors no doubt influence how people feel and react towards the once upon a time familiar routine of carrying out their tasks at their workplaces and which now, in turn, with the ever-changing shift like how the work is being done, has lost all semblance of familiarity and which in turn is affecting their levels of emotion and in the long run, their mental state and wellness.

2.1 Emotional Intelligence

Goleman's model of Emotional Intelligence focusses on competencies that are driven in the workplace (Boyatzis et al., 2000; Goleman, 1998, 2001). The model was designed, created, and adapted to suit a particular set of circumstances to predict the efficacy and the individual output in the workplace and in the organizational fields (Goleman, 1998). The model is based on several competencies identified by researchers who have carried out studies in various organizations. These competencies are attributed to the organisations' more brilliant and more successful employees (Goleman, 2001). Generally, the model presents itself in four essential dimensions. These dimensions are further sub-divided into 20 competencies (Boyatzis et al., 2000; Goleman, 2001): First, Self-Awareness which is made up of emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence; secondly followed by Social Awareness which in turn is made up of empathy, service orientation, and organizational awareness; thirdly is Self-Management which is made up self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, achievement-driven, and initiative; and finally, Relationship Management which is made up of developing others, influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, building bonds and teamwork and collaboration. According to Goleman (2001), each one of these four dimensions is the basis upon which to develop and further other learned abilities or competencies, which is integrally an inherent part of the field of the organization. These four dimensions have been further subdivided for the purposes of operationalization.

Emotional intelligence is the individual's ability to curb and have custody and control of the adverse emotions of anger, low self-worth, and angst by replacing or supplanting them with an optimistic flow of emotions and energy such as self-assurance, understanding and bonding. Individuals with weak emotional intelligence are more often than not faced with several difficulties in the management of stress-related issues. Hence a higher level of emotional intelligence also helps to deal with stress stricken problems and circumstances at the workplace (Sharma & Kumar, 2016).

There are plenty of discussions and debates on the different types of emotional intelligence, namely traits and the ability and the modes and methods of measurement of these constructs. These debates, though, are not discussed in this paper as a primary matter that encompasses and seeks to determine whether perceived social support would integrally affect emotional intelligence. In this paper, emotional intelligence is measured by the various dimensions of the personal and social competencies, giving due importance to one's own ability to manage one's emotions and to deal with the emotions of those within the people in their social/work circles (Van Oosten et al., 2019).

Personal competence is the inherent ability to recognize one's own internal biases, what instances trigger the various emotional responses from within and how best to address and appropriately handle these trigger mechanisms in a profoundly professional way and setting, such as with a customer or another colleague. Social competence capabilities are usually applied to and reflect the range of behaviours needed for the due enhancement of work-related performance (Franco et al., 2017). Both are equally important for the behavioural enhancement of one's role in the workplace (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2019). A study carried out on 184 front office public and private sector bank employees in the State of Punjab in India reveals a significantly close correlation between the state of emotional intelligence and the quality of the performance of the job done. (Kaur & Singh, 2021). Similarly, a significant positive effect of emotional intelligence on organizational performance was found in a study in a segment of the Malaysian Public Sector, suggesting the need to include emotional intelligence indicators and measures in the areas of staffing, knowledge expansion, staff forecasting, and succession planning and managerial development. Adopting emotional intelligence would also increase consciousness and wisdom, which would enable employees to grasp the current stimulating, responsive atmosphere (Supramaniam & Singaravelloo, 2021). Studies in recent years seem to suggest the importance of emotional intelligence in the service sector and especially in the fast-changing, volatile situations where a keen sense of adaptability is of extreme importance.

2.2 Service Sector

The very nature of the services sector, especially in the financial, insurance and banking industries, is well and widely known to be a stage whereupon the vast array of the drama of human emotions is enacted day in and day out. This sector, by extension and extrapolation then, holds the potential to be a complete panorama of interpersonal friction and conflict. The need for a very high degree of emotional intelligence on the part of the employees of the services sector cannot be underestimated and overlooked. This need becomes further accentuated during times of crisis, whereupon the high drama of human emotions is repetitively and incessantly played out. Greater emotional intelligence is significantly associated with less likelihood of engaging in uncivil behaviour (Loi et al., 2021), which is a corollary to the abovementioned proposition made.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Data collection tools and methods

The data collection for this study was done via the online social media, sharing the research link vide the Facebook and LinkedIn web pages, and through personally made contacts. The questionnaire was fully in English as a pilot test administered prior to data collection proved that the questionnaire was easily comprehended by the employees in the service sector. The introduction to the questionnaire included the researchers' institutional identity, a brief explanation of the aims and purposes of the study, and an invitation to engage in meaningful participation. Individuals were informed that participation is wholly upon a totally voluntary basis and that information obtained and secured would be kept highly confidential. Their informed consent was duly obtained from all the participants prior to allowing them

to answer the questions contained in the survey. The data accumulation and collection processes were ongoing for a period of three months which ended in the month of December 2020.

3.2 Population and Sampling

In terms of population, the study was focused on employees in the service sector in Malaysia. As the population size was not available, the researchers followed Roscoe's general rule of thumb, where sample size larger than 30 and less than 500 is considered adequate for most studies (Roscoe, 1975). The sampling technique is judgment or purposive as the study was focused on employees in the service sector only.

3.3 Measurement Tools

Initially, the background information of the respondents was duly obtained, mainly pertaining to particulars regarding gender, age group, place of residence, et cetera and which details were incorporated and included in this section. These questions used the nominal/ordinal scale. The rest of the questionnaire was predicated on two main scales, namely the Self-Assessment Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support.

The Self-Assessment Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire was taken from an adaptation made by the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence based on Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Framework (Goleman, 1998). It is made up of forty-three (43) items in total. The items include self-awareness (eleven (11) items measuring emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence), self-regulation (seventeen (17) items measuring self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, innovativeness) and self-motivation (fifteen (15) items measuring achievement drive, commitment, initiative, optimism). Self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation make the dimensions of personal competence. Fifty (50) items measured social awareness (eighteen (18) items measuring empathy, service orientation, developing others, leveraging diversity, political awareness) and social skills (thirty-two (32) items measuring influence, communication, leadership, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, team capabilities). Social awareness and social skills are integral dimensions of social competence. Some examples of these items are included: self-awareness (e.g., I am astutely aware of my inherent strengths and weaknesses), self-regulation (e.g., I think clearly and therefore I can stay focused under undue pressure), self-motivation (e.g., I have the innate habit of continuous learning in order to improve myself and therefore my work performance), social awareness (e.g., It has become habitual and second nature for me to be constantly acknowledging and rewarding people for their strengths, accomplishments, and development) and social skills (e.g., I readily acknowledge the need for positive change and am ready to challenge the status quo if the situation calls for it). Items were scored by using a response scale ranging from 1 (underdeveloped) to 5 (excellent). This questionnaire approach is predicated on a self-assessment basis. Table 1 enumerates and displays the number and the type of questions for each of the categorized dimensions.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988; Di Fabio & Busoni, 2008) is an Italian 12-item self-reporting questionnaire which focuses on teachers' perception of the notion of social support coming from their own personal experiences and events in their private lives with the ability to use and apply them in support of finding solutions to the problems and circumstances that surfaces in their day to day school-related stressful events. This questionnaire has been frequently and widely adopted, adapted and applied in studies where perceived social support application is used. A few examples of the items selected for this variable include the following: Significant Other (four items) (e.g., There is a special person always available to whom I can turn to when I am in need), family (four items) (e.g., My family really and sincerely try to help me), and Friends (four items) (e.g., I have close friends with whom I can share my joys and more importantly my sorrows). Items were scored by using a Likert-Type response scale ranging from 1 (Very Strongly disagree) to 7 (Very strongly Agree).

3.4 Ethical considerations

The questionnaire was only made available to the respondents after being vetted for procedural and substantive propriety and after the due written approval was obtained from the UiTM Ethics Committee.

Table 1: Questionnaire Design

Sections	Variables/ Number of questions/Scale	Dimensions	Example of Questions
A	Respondents' Background Information /7 Nominal/Ordinal	Gender Age Education Marital Status Area of Residence Private/Public Race	
B	Perceived Social Support /12 Likert Scale (1=Strongly disagree; 5=Strongly agree)	Significant Other (4)	There is a special person always available to whom I can turn to when I am in need
		Family (4)	My family really and sincerely try to help me
		Friends (4)	I have close friends with whom I can share my joys and more importantly my sorrows
C	Emotional Intelligence/93: Interval Scale (1=Under-developed; 5= Excellent)		
	(i) Personal Competence /43	a) Self Awareness	I recognize how my feelings affect my performance
		(i) Emotional awareness (4)	
		(ii) Accurate self-assessment (4)	I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses
(iii) Self-confidence (3)		I can voice views that are unpopular and go out on a limb	

			for what is right
	b)Self-Regulation	(i) Self control (3)	I think clearly and stay focused under pressure
	(ii) Trustworthi-ness (4)		I take tough, principled stands even if they are unpopular
	(iii) Conscien-tiousness (3)		I meet commitments and keep promises
	(iv) Adaptability (3)		I am flexible in how I see events
	(v) Innovative-ness (4)		I entertain original solutions to problems
	c)Self- Motivation	(i) Achieve-ment driven (4)	I continuously learn in order to improve my performance
	(ii)Commitment (4)		I actively seek out opportunities to fulfil the group's mission
	(iii) Initiative (4)		I am always ready to seize opportunities
	(iv) Optimism (3)		I am persistent in seeking goals despite obstacles and setbacks
ii) Social Competence/50	a)Social Awareness	(i)Empathy (3)	I show sensitivity and understand others' perspectives
	(ii)Service Orientation (4)		I gladly offer appropriate assistance
	(iii)Develop Others (3)		I offer useful feedback and identify people's needs for development
	(iv)Leverage Diversity (4)		I try to understand diverse worldviews and be sensitive to group differences
	(v)Political Awareness (4)		I can usually detect crucial social networks
	b) Social Skills	(i) Influence (4)	I am skilled at the art of persuasion
	(ii) Communication (4)		I deal with difficult issues straight-forwardly
	(iii) Leadership (4)		I lead by example
	(iv)Change catalyst (4)		I model the change expected of others
	(v)Conflict management (4)		I encourage debate and open discussion
	(vi)Building bonds (4)		I build rapport and keep others in the loop
	(vii) Collaboration (4)		I promote a friendly, cooperative climate
	(viii)Team capabilities (4)		I build team identity, esprit de corps, and commitment

4.0 Results and Discussion

The analysis for this study was based on the five hypotheses as stated below:

- H1: Perceived social support affects self-awareness
- H2: Perceived social support affects self-regulation
- H3: Perceived social support enhances self-motivation
- H4: Perceived social support increases social awareness
- H5: Perceived social support improves social skills

4.1 Profile of Respondents

The total responses in the sample for testing numbered 536, of which 70% (375) were females. The respondents' many holding Diplomas accounted for about 38% (204) and while those holding degrees formed 35% (187). The remainder of those in the sampling group was made up of postgraduates (44) and those holding secondary school certificates (101). In the stratification by race, Malays accounted for 36.4% (195), Chinese made up 30% (161), while the Indians made up 25.9% (139), reflecting more or less the Malaysian racial composition. Respondents from the Private sector service industries formed 68.5% (367), while the remaining were made up of people from the public service sectors (169). In an age-related categorization, about 60% (323) were made up of those between the ages of 20-40 years old.

4.2 Testing of Hypotheses

The data was first cleaned and screened using the SPSS version 26. Since data was collected on the basis of using the single-source data, the issue of the common method bias using the "full collinearity" test suggested by Kock and Lynn (2012) was duly applied. It is suggested that if the VIF values are less than 3.3, then there is no serious concern for the common method bias. To carry out this test, a random variable is first created, and then all the other variables were regressed simultaneously against this random variable. All the VIF values were found to be lower than 3.3, thus indicating that the common method bias is not a serious issue to the reliability of this study.

Next, SmartPLS 3.3.3 (Ringle et al., 2015) was used to test the validity, reliability and the hypotheses that were developed. This second-generation structural equation modelling software is a robust tool that is suitable to be used to test simultaneously, as there were multiple hierarchical component measures (Hair et al., 2021).

4.3 Measurement Model

As there were several hierarchical component models, the first order dimensions were assessed (Table 2) before assessing the higher-order constructs (Table 3). The average variance extracted (AVE) was all found to be above 0.5, and composite reliability (CR) was

recorded above 0.7; thus, the suitability of the convergent validity and the reliability of our measures were duly confirmed (Hair et al., 2021; Ramayah et al., 2018).

To test the discriminant validity, the HTMT ratio was used (Henseler et al., 2015). Franke and Sarstedt (2019) suggested that if the HTMT ratios are lower than 0.85 or 0.90, then there is no problem with discriminant validity. As shown in Table 4, the HTMT ratios are all lower than the 0.90 criterion, and as such, we can conclude that the measures are distinct.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness, Kurtosis, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance (AVE) Extracted First Order Dimensions

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Kurtosis	Skewness	CR	AVE
Accurate Self-Assessment	3.843	0.750	-0.640	-0.143	0.898	0.687
Achievement	3.813	0.729	-0.050	-0.190	0.898	0.687
Adaptability	3.796	0.745	-0.373	-0.063	0.901	0.753
Commitment	3.689	0.714	-0.084	-0.055	0.868	0.623
Conscientiousness	3.920	0.737	-0.506	-0.158	0.885	0.720
Emotional Awareness	3.786	0.791	-0.430	-0.203	0.907	0.709
Family	5.071	1.407	-0.468	-0.393	0.935	0.781
Friends	4.880	1.326	0.136	-0.445	0.936	0.784
Initiative	3.784	0.665	-0.063	-0.032	0.849	0.586
Innovativeness	3.815	0.696	-0.291	0.019	0.880	0.647
Optimism	3.849	0.711	-0.659	-0.033	0.867	0.686
Self Confidence	3.633	0.767	-0.048	-0.173	0.863	0.677
Significant Other	5.041	1.456	-0.391	-0.412	0.944	0.810
Self-Control	3.522	0.852	-0.112	-0.330	0.905	0.761
Trust	3.768	0.719	-0.385	-0.024	0.890	0.668
Building Bonds	3.846	0.716	-0.416	-0.004	0.898	0.688
Change	3.716	0.716	0.045	-0.072	0.883	0.654
Collaboration	3.838	0.731	-0.131	-0.146	0.902	0.697
Communication	3.773	0.756	-0.085	-0.125	0.904	0.703
Conflict Management	3.754	0.715	0.072	-0.116	0.877	0.641
Developing Others	3.855	0.720	-0.769	0.070	0.857	0.667
Empathy	3.921	0.753	-0.803	-0.115	0.883	0.716
Influence	3.749	0.739	-0.547	0.039	0.885	0.660
Leadership	3.721	0.734	-0.159	-0.086	0.896	0.683
Leveraging Diversity	3.726	0.700	-0.102	0.021	0.894	0.679
Political Awareness	3.657	0.751	0.073	-0.133	0.894	0.679
Service Orientation	3.890	0.665	-0.699	0.101	0.889	0.668
Team Capabilities	3.779	0.642	-0.566	0.254	0.854	0.593

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness, Kurtosis, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of Second Order Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Kurtosis	Skewness	CR	AVE
Self-Awareness (SA)	3.768	0.688	-0.370	-0.069	0.920	0.792
Self-Motivation (SM)	3.782	0.606	0.254	-0.028	0.917	0.735
Self-Regulation (SR)	3.777	0.638	-0.049	0.031	0.932	0.734
Social Awareness	3.806	0.611	-0.287	0.273	0.932	0.733
Social Skills	3.773	0.603	-0.224	0.173	0.934	0.649
Social Support (SS)	5.000	1.203	-0.200	-0.351	0.893	0.737

Table 4: Discriminant Validity of the main constructs (HTMT)

Variables	Self-Awareness	Self-Motivation	Self-Regulation	Social Awareness	Social Skills	Social support
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Self-Awareness						
Self-Motivation	0.828					
Self-Regulation	0.851	0.847				
Social Awareness	0.672	0.435	0.552			
Social Skills	0.664	0.673	0.590	0.843		
Social Support	0.623	0.588	0.597	0.486	0.501	

4.4 Structural Model

To assess the hypotheses generated, a bias corrected bootstrapping with a resample size of 5,000 was carried out (Hair et al., 2021). For Self-Awareness (SA) the $R^2 = 0.280$ ($Q^2 = 0.219$), Self-Regulation (SR) the $R^2 = 0.270$ ($Q^2 = 0.195$) and Self-Motivation (SM) the $R^2 = 0.256$ ($Q^2 = 0.185$) which shows that 28% of the variance in Self-Awareness, 27% of the variance in Self-Regulation and 25.6% of the variance in Self-Motivation can be explained by Social Support (SS). For Social Awareness the $R^2 = 0.181$ ($Q^2 = 0.131$) and Social Skills the $R^2 = 0.192$ ($Q^2 = 0.118$) which shows that 18.1% of the variance in Social Awareness, and 19.2% of the variance in Social Skills can be explained by Social Support (SS).

Table 5: Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Relationships	Std. Beta	Std. Dev	t-value	p-value	BCILL	BCIUL	f2
H1	Social Support → Self-Awareness	0.529	0.038	13.806	p<.001	0.461	0.587	0.388
H2	Social Support → Self-Regulation	0.520	0.038	13.529	p<.001	0.452	0.578	0.370
H3	Social Support → Self-Motivation	0.506	0.039	13.064	p<.001	0.436	0.566	0.344
H4	Social Support → Social Awareness	0.425	0.044	9.599	p<.001	0.345	0.490	0.220
H5	Social Support → Social Skills	0.439	0.040	11.084	p<.001	0.366	0.495	0.238

As shown in Table 5, SS → SA ($\beta=0.529$, $p<0.01$), SS → SR ($\beta=0.520$, $p<0.01$) and SS → SM ($\beta=0.506$, $p<0.01$) were all positively related thus supporting H1, H2 and H3 of our study. SS → Social Awareness ($\beta=0.425$, $p<0.01$) and SS → Social Skills ($\beta=0.439$, $p<0.01$) were both positive and significant thus supporting H4 and H5 of our study.

5.0 Limitations

There are a number of limitations in this study. Firstly, this study only had service sector employees as the respondents, hence limiting the generalizations of the findings. Secondly, there are a number of Emotional Intelligence questionnaires that are available to be used and although they generally measure similar dimensions, there could be differences in the overall findings compared to the findings of this study.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Perceived social support was found to be of a higher value for personal competence when compared to social competence. Hence for an individual to increase his/her self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation, perceived social support is pertinent. It is also useful for social competence but to a lesser degree. Social support was also found to be a strong associative factor when one's cognitive functions are on the decline and when the person undergoes dementia (Morento et al., 2021). In our fast embracing digitalized age, though, social support is not regarded as that pertinent as lives transform and become highly individualized, lessening the impact, effect and importance of community and family ties. This study, however, clearly indicates how social support is a necessary element for an individual to stay focused and on an even keel.

As the pace of change frantically increases and the world of work makes ever greater demands on a person's cognitive, emotional, and physical resources, emotional intelligence will become even more important. It cannot be denied that all the components that make up emotional intelligence are extremely useful in the workplace as both personal and social competence is necessary to ensure a healthy and productive workplace. However, this study shows that when people perceive that they have the social support from their family, their friends, and their significant others, they do acquire a higher degree of emotional intelligence. This is a useful finding as it shows how relationships matter, and if there is low social support, then emotional intelligence is affected. In fact, both emotional intelligence and social support is associated with low levels of burnout among teachers (Fiorilli et al., 2019). In addition, emotional intelligence and social support were the two factors that prevented occupational stress during Covid-19 (Valenti et al., 2021).

Hence focusing on building relationships and ties at the workplace is extremely important as this can affect emotional intelligence which then affects worker productivity and efficiency. This aspect has suffered in recent years due to the pandemic that limited physical

gatherings and networking. Workplaces must put in place programs which help build social support among the employees to strengthen their emotional intelligence.

Future studies on these aspects can look at the different sectors of the industries which make up the Malaysian economy and also conduct a more detailed analysis to determine which sources of perceived support have a higher degree of influence.

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