

## ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE: EXPLORING THE DIMENSIONS OF YOUNG ADULT SOCIAL COMPETENCE

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### ABSTRACT

*It is very consistent in the sense that social competence was predictive of youth employability. Unlike many previous surveys, the present study utilized multiple measures and provided a more comprehensive picture of social young adults' perception of social competence in the domains of social (communicative competence and assertiveness), cognition (critical thinking and future orientation), and emotion (identity formation and prosocial tendency). Six measures of social competence were completed by 1134 university students in six randomly selected universities. Analyses revealed most young adults were situationally non-assertive and scored lower communicative competence. Moreover, they were more frequently concerned about family-related, financial-related, and educational-related aspects, but less involved in civic engagement. Of significance, critical thinking or problem-solving skills among young adults should be of concern. The identity formation also poor manifested due to extending exploration of the self and undecided manner in young adulthood. Interestingly, emotional benefits have been directed students to become involved in more prosocial behavior. The findings may be useful for social efforts to promote social competence in early adulthood and for their later working life.*

**Keywords:** cognitive, emotional, social, social competence, young adults

### INTRODUCTION

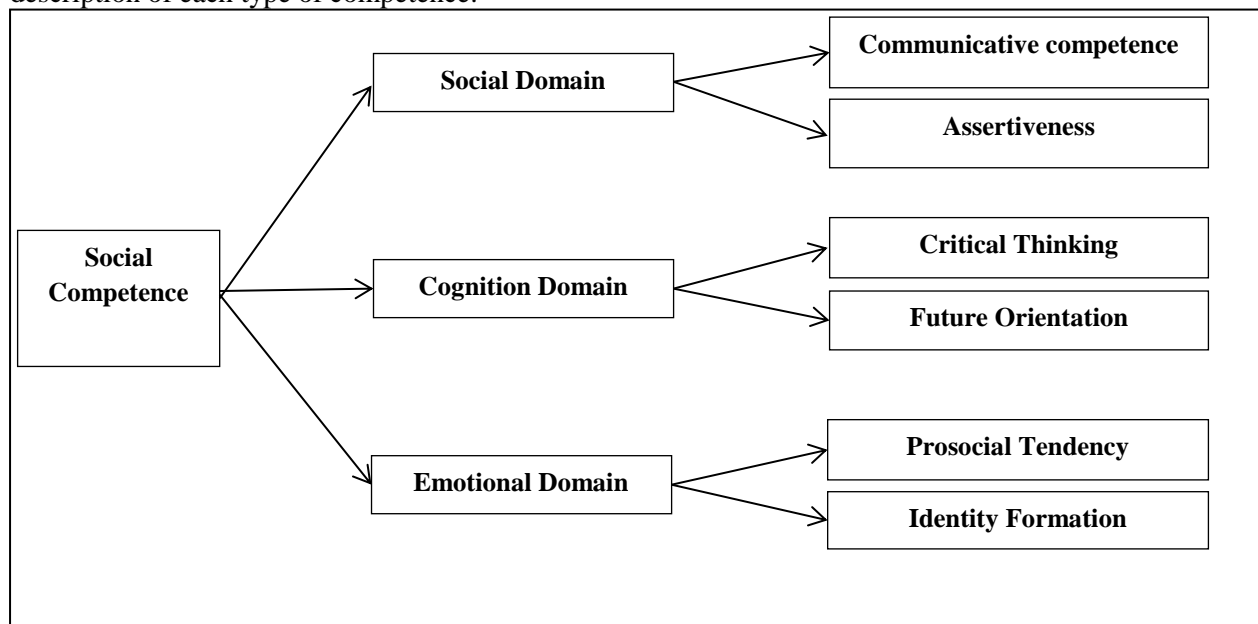
Graduate unemployment often becomes a public health concern. About 30000 students self-reported they were unable to obtain a job after six months graduation (Lopez, 2011, Feb 6). In the end of the year, the number snowballed up to 71600 graduates (Aruna, 2011, July 17). Ample evidences have shown that social competence such as oral communication, critical thinking, and problem solving skills are essential for helping young adults succeed academically and professionally (Azman, 2009; Devadason, Subramaniam, Daniel, 2010; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2011; Singh & Singh, 2008). Individuals with strong soft skills or high social competence were more likely than their peers to adapt in fluid working environments (Pool & Sewell, 2007).

Unlike other psychological constructs like intelligence, little scholarly attention was given to the contours of social competence as it is much more malleable (Dirks, Treat, & Weersing, 2007). Thence, there is little consistency in how social competence is conceptualized across the literature. Some

place emphasis on making friends and some on emotional skills. Generally, social competence is defined as a condition of possessing the social, emotional, and cognitive skills necessary to be adapted effectively across a variety of social settings (Welsh, Blair, Bierman, & Nelson, 2010). In the Bierman's (2004) study, social competence was referred to as "the capacity to coordinate adaptive response flexibly to various interpersonal demands and to organize social behaviour in different social contexts in a manner beneficial to oneself and consistent with social conventions and morals" (p. 141).

In operationalizing the social competence, Welsh *et al.* (2010) clarified social competence is a multidimensional construct which involves three main dimensions including social, cognitive, and emotion. In correspondence, multiple competence measures including (a) communicative competence, (b) assertiveness, (c) critical thinking, (d) future orientation, (e) identity formation, and (f) prosocial tendency were used to reflect three dimensions of youth's social competence in this study (see Figure 1).

The following paragraphs provide a greater description of each type of competence.



**Figure 1** Model Underlying the Social Competence

Specifically, social domain consists of communicative competence and assertiveness. In today's society, communicative competence is one of the most indispensable skills required to succeed. According to McCroskey and McCroskey (1988, p. 109), communicative competence refers to the self-perception of "adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing." Individuals who communicatively competent often appear as an effective communicator (Morreale & Pearson, 2008), and thereby have more competitive advantages in today's job market (Azman, 2009). On the other hand, assertiveness is generally considered the ability to make requests, actively disagree, express what they think and feel, and to stand up for self while not violating the personal rights of others (Ames, 2009). There is a strong evidence suggesting that assertive is not synonymous with aggression, instead it is a skill that can help people to express their emotions diplomatically (Ilhan, Sukut, Utas Akhan, & Batmaz, 2016). Therefore, social literacy allows youth to promote harmonious relationships among people (Ilhan *et al.*, 2016; Morreale & Pearson, 2008).

Furthermore, cognitive domain is operationalized as critical thinking and future

orientation. Critical thinking is characterized as a form of thinking involves problem solving, inference formulation, probability estimation,

and decision making in order to achieve desirable outcomes (Butler, 2012). Individuals with high critical thinking tend to make a good decision after consideration of all pertaining factors and the likely consequences of alternative courses of action (Lim, 2015). Orientation toward the future has also been examined in relations to young people's cognitive competence (Manzi, Vignoles, & Regalia, 2010). According to So, Voisin, Burnside, and Gaylord-Harden (2016), future orientation refers to the extent to which one thinks about the future. Chiu (2012) argued that individuals who high in future orientation usually proactively plan their future and take initiative to follow their plans. In contrast, underprepared individuals are less able to compete successfully with others and lack confidence in themselves. Therefore, cognitive literacy allows youth to become increasingly capable of constructing ways of understanding their own world (Butler, 2012; So *et al.*, 2016) In addition to social-cognitive domains, development of social competence may not fully understand if not considering the emotion dimension (Roselina, 2009; Welsh *et al.*, 2010). Prosocial behavior has drawn attention

as a potential variable for emotional competence (Carlo & Randal, 2002). According to Eisenberg and Mussen (1989, p. 3) prosocial tendency refers to “voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals.” Prosocial youth tend to be more social aware by receptive to other’s emotional cues, feelings, and needs and increase capacity for empathic involvement (Xu, Bèguea, & Bushman, 2012). Identity formation has also found to strongly influence emerging adult’s emotional competence as it is a time of experiencing identity cohesion or identity confusion (Herman, 2011). They explore possible directions in life and often try out various possibilities. As young people consider what possibilities are available to them, they tend to be more aware their feelings and thoughts by accurately evaluating personal abilities and interests (Herman, 2011). Therefore, emotional literacy allows youth to be more effective in handling aversive and distressing circumstances (Herman, 2011; Xu *et al.*, 2012). Taken together, there is strong evidence from prior studies that a set of characteristics and skills could all fall under the general heading of ‘social competence,’ acknowledging that social competence have social, cognitive, and emotional elements (Butler, 2012; Herman, 2011; Ilhan *et al.*, 2016; Morreale & Pearson, 2008; So *et al.*, 2016; Xu *et al.*, 2012).

Unfortunately, thus far, the phrase ‘social competence’ was to be interpreted broadly within the prior literature (Al-Mahmmoda & Grubaa, 2007; Star & Hammer, 2008; Welsh *et al.*, 2010). Most importantly, most relevant previous studies were published between 1995 and 2005 (Dirks *et al.*, 2007) and primarily studied in the Western countries, particularly United Kingdom and United States (Roselina, 2009; So *et al.*, 2016). As a result, the construct of social competence poorly understood among Malaysian youth. To fill the research gap, the present study used a sample of Malaysian youth to assess individual perception of social competence in the domains of social (communicative competence, assertiveness), cognitive (critical thinking, future orientation), and emotional (identity formation, prosocial tendency).

## METHOD

### Participants

The sample was initially stratified according to the types of institution, fields of study, years of study, and genders in order to generate a heterogeneous sample. Of the returned questionnaires, 1134 were considered valid and the data were entered for subsequent analysis. In particular, 413 were males and 721 were females ranged in ages from 17 to 32 years, with a mean age of 21.2 years ( $SD = 1.75$ ). As many as 57.9% students were studying in public universities and the remaining 42.1% studying in private universities. About 52.7% students were completing their final year, and 47.3% enrolled as freshmen. With regard to the fields of study, 51.1% were Social Science stream, 38.7% were Science stream, and the remaining 10.2% were Technical stream.

### Materials

**Communicative competence.** The 12-item Self-Perceived Communicative Competence Scale (SPCC; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) was used to assess self-perceived competence in four communication contexts: public speaking, meeting, small group, and pair and with three types of receivers: stranger, acquaintance, and friend. Participants were asked to estimate on a 0-100 scale (100 being very competent) depending on how competent they are in a variety of communication settings and with a variety of types of receiver. The total score was the sum of the scores of all the items, with higher scores indicated higher communicative competence. Cronbach’s alpha for the current sample was .90.

**Assertiveness.** The 30-item Rathus’s Assertiveness Schedule (RAS; 1973) was used to measure global feelings of assertiveness. Participants were asked to rate on a six-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (very characteristic of me, extremely descriptive) to 6 (very uncharacteristic of me, extremely undescriptive). The total score was the sum of the scores of all the items, with higher scores indicated higher levels of

assertiveness. Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was .75.

**Future orientation.** The 13-item Future Orientation Questionnaire (FOQ; Nurmi *et al.*, 1990) was used to measure youths' perception of their future accomplishments and experiences in the domains of education, occupation, family friends, and community. Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (everyday). The total score was the sum of the scores of all the items, with higher scores indicated greater future-oriented thinking. Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was .83.

**Critical thinking.** The 26-item University of Florida- Engagement, Maturity, and Innovativeness (UF-EMI; Irani *et al.*, 2007) was used to assess three constructs of critical thinking disposition: Engagement, Cognitive Maturity, and Innovativeness. Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert-scale with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The total score was the sum of the scores of all the items, with higher scores indicated greater critical thinking. Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was .93.

**Identity formation.** The 12-item identity formation subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI; Rosenthal *et al.*, 1981) was used to measure the psychosocial stage of identity. Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me well) to 5 (describes me well). The total score was the sum of the scores of all the items, with higher scores indicated higher levels of identity formation. Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was .73.

**Prosocial Tendency.** The 11-item of public, emotional, and altruism subscales of the Prosocial Tendencies Measure (PTM; Carlo & Randal, 2002) was used to assess individual's prosocial tendencies. Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 5 (describe me greatly). The total score was the sum of the scores of all the items, with higher scores indicated greater prosocial tendency. Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was .60.

## Procedure

In this study, data were collected using self-administered questionnaires. Approval of questionnaire distribution was initially sought from the Ministry of Higher Education and Registrar Offices from each tertiary education institution. Upon obtaining approval, questionnaires were distributed to the participants during the designated time with the assistance from the assigned lecturers that identified by the faculties. In regards of the ethical concern, participants were informed about their rights to be a sample in this study including voluntary basis, right of withdrawal, data anonymity, data confidentiality, and potential risks. After signing up the informed consent form, students were requested to fill in the questionnaire within the specified time. Those who returned completed questionnaire were given a notepad and a pen as a token of appreciation for participating this study.

## RESULTS

The mean score for communicative competence was 61.73 ( $SD = 17.06$ ). Using norm scores defined by McCroskey and McCroskey (1988), 588 (51.9%) students were scored moderately, 478 (42.2%) were low competence, and only 62 (5.5%) were high competence. When compared with the authors' norm sample study, the score distributions of the communicative competence for this sample were slightly lower. Table 1 shows that the items that received the highest rating, in descending order, are as follows: talk with friends ( $M = 82.02$ ,  $SD = 21.43$ ), talk in a small group of friends ( $M = 72.71$ ,  $SD = 24.19$ ), and present a talk to a group of friends ( $M = 70.61$ ,  $SD = 23.96$ ). By contrast, students were less competent when present a talk to a group of acquaintances ( $M = 54.64$ ,  $SD = 25.81$ ), talk to a strangers ( $M = 50.55$ ,  $SD = 26.84$ ), and talk in a large meeting of strangers ( $M = 49.01$ ,  $SD = 26.70$ ).

**Table 1** Mean and Standard Deviations for Communicative Competence Scale Items

Statement	N	Mean	SD
Talk with friend	1134	82.02	21.43
Talk in a small group of friend	1131	72.71	24.19
Present a talk to a group of friends	1134	70.61	23.96
Talk in a large meeting of friends	1133	65.32	25.18
Talk with an acquaintance	1134	63.47	23.96
Talk in a small group of acquaintance	1131	61.30	24.43
Present a talk a group of acquaintance	1130	58.08	25.65
Talk in a group of strangers	1134	56.65	26.01
Talk in a large meeting of acquaintance	1134	56.46	25.57
Present a talk to a group of acquaintance	1134	54.64	25.81
Talk with a stranger	1134	50.55	26.84
Talk in a large meeting of stranger	1131	49.01	26.70

Note. N denotes valid cases. SD denotes standard deviation. Sample size varies due to missing data, Anchors are 0 (totally incompetence) to 100 (totally competence)

The mean score for assertiveness was -2.51 (SD = 18.13). Based on the cut-off score definition by Rathus (1973), two-fifths of students self-identified as situationally non-assertive, 30.9% were somewhat assertive, 7.5% were assertive, and 1.6% were probably aggressive. Table 2 shows that more than eighty percent of students agreed that they strive to get ahead as well as most people, insist upon knowing why when they are asked to do something, but they are also careful to avoid hurting other people feelings although they have been injured. About three-fourths of students agreed that there are times they look for a good, vigorous argument and enjoy starting conversations with new acquaintances and strangers, but they tend to bottle up their emotions rather make a scene,

and sometimes afraid that they will get so upset that they will shake all over during an argument and don't what to say when they are given a compliment. There were mixed views in some statements among the students. About half of students agreed that they have a difficult time in saying no if a salesman has gone to considerable trouble to show them merchandise which is not quite suitable, hesitate to make phone calls to business establishments and institutions, and unlikely complain about food served at restaurant although it is not done to their satisfaction and poor service either in the restaurant or elsewhere. Taken together, the study sample tend to less assertive to avoid hurting other people's feelings, but more assertive when it comes to task fulfilment.

**Table 2** Percent of Response Option Selection for Assertiveness Scale Items

Statement	VYUM (%)	RUM (%)	SUM (%)	SLM (%)	RLM (%)	VMLM (%)
Most people seem to be more aggressive and assertive than I am.	6.4	10.7	14.2	37.2	23.8	7.8
I have hesitated to make or accept dates because of "shyness."	6.9	13.1	15.6	30.3	23.5	10.6
When the food served at restaurant is not done to my satisfaction, I complain about it to the waiter or waitress.	17.2	25.7	19.5	20.1	11.3	5.9
I am careful to avoid hurting other people's feelings, even when I feel that I have been injured.	2.7	3.8	9.7	19.0	30.3	34.5
If a salesman has gone to considerable trouble to show me merchandise which is not quite suitable, I have a difficult time in saying "No."	12.1	15.0	16.4	26.2	20.1	10.2

When I am asked to do something, I insist upon knowing why.	1.7	6.2	10.7	27.9	32.0	21.5
There are times when I look for a good, vigorous argument.	2.9	7.9	12.4	32.8	29.5	14.5
I strive to get ahead as well as most people in my position.	1.2	2.7	6.5	21.2	34.2	34.1
To be honest, people often take advantage of me.	5.9	11.6	23.8	28.5	19.4	10.8
I enjoy starting conversations with new acquaintances and strangers.	2.5	6.9	16.4	30.2	26.5	17.5
I often don't know how to say to attractive persons of the opposite sex.	8.0	13.5	19.7	23.1	22.8	12.8
I will hesitate to make phone calls to business establishments and institutions.	7.8	16.0	19.4	24.1	20.0	12.7
I would rather apply for a job or for admission to a college by writing letters than by going through with personal interviews.	9.5	14.1	16.3	25.2	21.9	13.0
I find it embarrassing to return merchandise.	13.5	19.8	21.4	23.0	15.7	6.5
If a close and respected relative were annoying me, I would smother my feelings rather than express my annoyance.	5.1	9.3	16.8	30.9	24.3	13.5
I have avoided asking questions for fear of sounding stupid.	8.0	13.6	18.6	31.9	19.5	8.4
During an argument I am sometimes afraid that I will get so upset that I will shake all over.	3.9	7.2	12.7	23.7	28.9	23.7
If a famed and respected lecturer makes a statement which I think is incorrect, I will have the audience hear my point of view as well.	7.4	11.7	23.7	34.3	17.4	5.6
I avoid arguing over prices with clerks and salesmen.	9.3	14.3	20.6	25.4	19.6	10.9
When I have done something important or worthwhile, I manage to let others know about it.	4.7	10.9	19.6	33.0	23.4	8.4
I am open and frank about my feelings.	4.3	10.5	18.4	32.2	22.3	12.3
If someone has been spreading false and bad stories about me, I see him (her) as soon as possible to "have a talk" about it.	5.6	8.8	22.2	27.2	23.0	13.2
I often have a hard time saying "No."	5.3	10.0	19.5	30.6	21.1	13.6
I tend to bottle up my emotions rather than make a scene.	3.2	7.3	14.3	30.1	27.5	17.6
I complain about poor service in a restaurant and elsewhere.	8.7	18.8	25.2	25.9	15.6	5.8
When I am given a compliment, I sometimes just don't know what to say.	1.9	7.1	12.4	32.2	27.1	19.3
If a couple near me in theatre or at lecture were conversing rather loudly, I would ask them to be quiet or to take their conversation elsewhere.	10.2	18.0	27.4	25.0	13.3	6.1
Anyone attempting to push ahead of me in a line is in for a good battle.	5.0	9.4	22.4	34.6	19.9	8.7
I am quick to express an opinion.	4.9	12.0	24.7	30.1	19.9	8.4
There are times when I just can't say anything.	8.8	12.5	19.1	27.5	19.2	12.9

*Note.* % denotes percentage; VMUM denotes very much unlike me; RUM denotes rather unlike me; SUM denotes slightly unlike me; SLM denotes slightly like me; RLM denotes rather like me; VMLM denotes very much like me

The mean score for future orientation was 47.22 ( $SD = 7.95$ ). Using mean  $\pm$  1 standard deviation, 70.5% of students had a moderate level of future orientation. The numbers of students who reported lower future orientation

were slightly more than (13.4%) higher counterparts (13.1%). Table 3 shows that one-thirds students reported that they are everyday planned issues relevant to education, job/occupation, professional career, financial

situation, and parents and other family members. However, 44.5% and 29.4% of students indicated that they rarely concerned about parenthood and intimate partnerships, in respectively. It is worth to highlighting that

36.2% of students were often thought country and the world issues, while 63.8% were sometimes, rarely, or never.

**Table 3** Percent of Response Option Selection for Future Orientation Scale Items

Statements	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Every day (%)
Education	3.3	2.9	16.8	43.7	33.6
Major subject in college	2.0	5.8	22.9	44.4	24.9
Job/ occupation	2.4	5.8	18.9	36.6	36.3
Professional career	1.9	5.4	20.2	36.6	35.8
Romantic partner	12.6	16.8	29.1	20.9	20.6
Future spouse	6.2	14.3	27.0	28.2	24.3
Children	22.4	22.1	28.4	16.4	10.6
Financial situation	2.9	5.7	16.5	36.0	38.9
What will be with me, in general	2.7	6.8	21.6	38.5	30.4
Country and the world	9.2	22.9	31.7	24.5	11.7
Parents and other family members	1.6	5.5	12.1	31.4	49.4
Close friend	1.7	8.4	30.9	41.1	18.0
Any other issue	7.1	15.3	42.0	21.9	13.7

Note. % denotes percentage

The mean score for critical thinking was 95.01 (*SD* = 13.69). Just like future orientation, 71.5% of students scored moderate level of critical thinking. The numbers of students who reported higher critical thinking were slightly more than (13.2%) lower counterparts (12.5%). Table 4 shows that more than three-fourths of students agreed that they look for opportunities to solve problems and they believe most problems have more than one

solution. However, some skills such as asking questions in a learning environment, finding answers to challenging questions, problem solving, learning in outside school, explain things clearly, and present issues in a clear and precise manner were not as highly developed. In other words, it might reflect most current sample were less capable to manage personal learning and problem solving.

**Table 4** Percent of Response Option Selection for Critical Thinking Scale Items

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	NDOA (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
I listen carefully to the opinion of others even when they disagree with me.	.8	5.7	20.1	52.2	21.1
I look for opportunities to solve problems.	.4	3.2	14.5	57.7	24.2
I am interested in many issues.	.7	7.4	30.2	43.1	18.6
I enjoy learning about many topics.	2.0	7.8	28.9	41.9	19.4
I am able to relate to a wide variety of issues.	2.2	9.8	35.7	40.5	11.8
I ask lots of questions in a learning environment.	4.2	20.0	39.0	28.4	8.4
I enjoy finding answers to challenging questions.	3.7	12.8	34.5	38.5	10.4
I am a good problem solver.	2.7	14.3	43.7	33.0	6.3
I am confident that I can reach a reasonable conclusion.	1.6	7.3	33.4	47.1	10.5

It is important to be well informed.	.5	4.8	17.6	46.5	30.7
I am likely to change my opinion when I am given new information that conflicts with my current opinion.	1.3	6.7	28.1	48.2	15.6
I enjoy solving problems.	2.2	8.1	32.3	44.4	13.0
I try to consider the facts without letting my biases affect my decisions.	1.1	6.6	27.2	50.2	14.9
I am able to apply my knowledge to a wide variety of issues.	1.2	7.1	35.0	44.7	12.0
I enjoy learning even when I am not in school.	3.9	9.2	26.7	43.4	16.8
I can get along with people who do not share my opinions.	1.9	8.5	28.4	47.0	14.2
I am able to explain things clearly.	2.0	13.3	35.8	37.7	11.2
I ask good questions when trying to clarify a solution.	2.0	7.1	29.9	46.4	14.6
I present issues in a clear and precise manner.	1.5	10.1	36.5	41.1	10.9
I consider how my own biases affect my opinions.	2.6	11.6	33.5	41.5	10.9
I search for the truth even when it makes me uncomfortable.	1.4	6.0	24.1	52.5	15.9
I keep on working on things until I get them rights.	1.1	4.6	24.4	50.4	19.4
I will go out of my way to find the right answers to a problem.	1.1	5.7	22.7	51.1	19.3
I try to find multiple solutions to problems.	1.6	6.6	22.2	52.6	17.0
I ask many questions when making decisions.	1.1	7.4	27.2	47.3	16.9
I believe that most problems have more than one solution.	1.1	4.5	16.9	46.3	31.2

*Note.* % denotes percentage; *SD* denotes strongly disagree; *D* denotes disagree; *NDOA* denotes neither disagree or agree; *A* denotes agree; *SA* denotes strongly agree.

On the identity formation measure, the mean score was 40.85 ( $SD = 5.94$ ). A total of 71.75% of students were found to have a moderate level of identity formation. The number of students who reported higher identity formation were slightly more than (13.3%) than lower counterparts (7.0%). Table 5 shows that 91.4% of students agreed that they have a strong sense of sex identity and 86.2% of them agreed that they got a clear

sense of gender identity. Furthermore, most students indicated that they cleared what kind of important things to them, what kind of person they are, and proud of what they stand for. However, most students experienced the transformation of self by expressing the feeling of mixed up, change opinion a lot, and can't decide what they want to do with their life at the same time.

**Table 5** Percent of Response Option Selection for Identity Formation Scale Items

<b>Statement</b>	<b>HET</b>	<b>NVT</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>TMOTN</b>	<b>AAT</b>
I change my opinion of myself a lot.	4.2	12.5	45.2	30.2	7.9
I've got a clear of what I want to be.	1.9	11.0	31.4	39.8	16.0
I feel mixed up.	5.2	20.3	43.9	23.4	7.2
The important things life are clear to me.	.9	8.5	28.7	42.6	19.3
I've got it together.	1.9	11.0	40.4	34.7	12.1
I know what kind of person I am.	1.2	7.8	26.6	43.2	21.1
I can't decide what I want to do with my life.	11.8	28.1	31.1	22.2	6.9
I have a strong sense of what it means to be female/ male.	2.6	6.1	20.7	42.4	28.3
I like myself and am proud of what I stand for.	1.9	8.0	26.9	41.5	21.8
I don't really know what I'm all about.	31.6	29.8	22.2	12.4	4.1
I find I have to keep up a front when I'm with people.	10.4	17.5	36.1	28.4	7.6
I don't really feel involved.	13.5	23.9	41.7	17.0	3.9

*Note.* % denotes percentage; *HET* denotes hardly ever true; *NVT* denotes not very true; *ST* denotes sometimes true; *TMOTN* denotes true more often than not; *AAT* denotes almost always true.



**Table 6** Percent of Response Option Selection for Prosocial Tendency Scale Items

Prosocial tendency	Does not	Little	Sometimes	Well	Greatly
It is most fulfilling to me when I can comfort someone who is very distressed.	3.4	7.2	29.0	36.4	24.0
I think that one of the best things about helping others is that it makes me look good.	9.8	15.7	28.9	31.6	14.0
When people ask me to help them, I don't hesitate.	2.4	9.1	30.0	40.8	17.7
I believe that donating goods or money work best when it is tax-deductible.	13.3	17.0	34.9	24.3	10.5
I respond to helping others best when the situation is highly emotional.	2.2	9.0	27.7	44.8	16.3
I never hesitate to help others when they ask for it.	3.0	8.7	28.3	42.3	17.8
I believe I should receive more recognition for the time and energy I spend on charity work.	20.3	22.1	29.5	21.9	6.2
I tend to help others particularly when they are emotionally distressed.	1.6	9.8	27.3	44.8	16.5
One of the best things about doing charity work is that it looks good on my resume.	21.9	21.6	28.0	22.5	6.0
Emotional situations make me want to help needy others.	3.4	8.6	30.5	41.7	15.8
I feel that if I help someone, they should help me in the future.	29.5	20.8	21.7	17.4	10.6

*Note.* % denotes percentage; Does not denotes does not describe me at all; Little denotes describe me at little; Sometimes denotes sometimes describes me; Well denotes describes me well; Greatly denotes describe me greatly.

For the PTM questionnaire, the mean score of prosocial tendency was 37.57 (*SD* = 5.15). Using mean ± 1 standard deviation, 77.1% of students located in the range of moderate. The number of students who reported higher prosocial tendency were slightly more than (13.2%) than lower counterparts (8.8%). Table 6 shows that over 90% of students felt prosocial behaviour can give a sense of fulfilment. In addition, 88.6% of students, at least sometimes, were tended help others particularly when they are emotionally distressed. This shows that students feel emotional benefits when they help others. The students' opinions were mixed on the notion that donating goods or money work best when it is tax-deductible. Although more students agreed that they would prefer donations to charity can reduce tax bills, they don't seem to value extrinsic reward for helping someone. While 28.5% of students agreed that doing charity work able to look good on their resume, 43.5% answered "a little" or "does not at all" to this statement. Moreover, 57.5% of the students indicated that emotional situations

make them want to help needy others, and 45.6% answered "a little" or "does not at all" to the item "one of the best things about helping others is that it makes them look good."

## DISCUSSION

To recap, this study aims to present and discuss Malaysia youth's perception about their social competence in the domains of social, emotional, and cognitive. Amongst the cohort of Malaysian youth examined, this study assessed measures of demographic, communicative competence, assertiveness, future-orientation, critical thinking, identity formation, and prosocial tendency. Major findings indicated that Malaysian youth were situationally non-assertive and scored lower communicative competence. Like many countries, most of them, on average, were moderately possessed skills in terms of future-orientation, critical thinking, identity formation, and prosocial tendency (Butler,

2012; Herman, 2011; So *et al.*, 2016; Xu *et al.*, 2012).

With regards to future orientation, youth were more frequently concerned about family-related, financial-related, and educational-related aspects, but less concerned about civic engagement. Of significance, in the context of critical thinking, problem-solving skills and self-learning ability among young adults should be of concern. Some aspects of identity formation also poor manifested, particularly extending exploration of the self and undecided manner in young adulthood. Although the current sample exhibited somewhat favourable attitude towards prosocial behaviour, emotional benefits were found especially useful to direct them to become more involved in prosocial behaviour.

This study brings several implications including theoretical and practical aspects. Some of the examples include the survey of inspection findings from 1134 university students produces an overview identifying most critical soft skills which advance purposeful development of social competence among youth. As previously, there is evidence that suggests social competence has greater impact than academic achievement to hold full-time jobs (Azman, 2009; Devadason *et al.*, 2010; Singh & Singh, 2008). It is a traditional belief that social skills would help individuals sustain in myriad social contexts especially in the working context. With the increasing numbers of graduates with unemployment (Aruna, 2011, July 17; Lopez, 2011, Feb 6), this study provides an insightful message to improve soft skills of young adults. These findings will be useful for intervention purposes. Lots of incompetence aspects discussed here should take account into developmental policies to reduce graduates' unemployment trends (Roselina, 2009). This potentially fruitful area of policy recommendations that permit good practice and initiatives across the Malaysia in promoting social competence development in pedagogical learning environments (Devadason *et al.*, 2010; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2011). As a result, it might be helpful to ensure youth equip with adequate social competence to allow them meet, interact and cooperative with other individuals.

From as wide a range of eligible literature as possible, this study adds to the growing body of local research to provide a useful background framework against which we could compare with Western findings (Dirks *et al.*, 2007; So *et al.*, 2016). Also, this study first addresses the multidimensional construct of social competence by including a synthesis of competence measures. To the best of the author knowledge, there are no measures yet to assess social competence among emerging adults (Welsh *et al.*, 2010). The multiple competence measures adopted in the study allows the acquisition of information relevant to social competence in order to provide an individual competence profile. It can support the development of training programme aimed at young adults with low social competence (Pool & Sewell, 2007).

Although the study findings are promising, this study is subjected few limitations. It is critical to understand what factors are essential for enhancing youth social competence. Further studies are needed to precisely identify how personal and environmental factors can influence youth social competence. Also the reliance on different measures of social competence might harm measurement reliability and statistical power, so the current results may lower sensitivity power of the social competence measures. Future research may profitably incorporate a fuller and valid measure of social competence. In conclusions, this study emphasizes the development of social, emotional, and thinking skills are crucial to leading social inclusion, personal enrichment, active citizenship and employability in the 21st knowledge society.

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