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Emotional intelligence of Malaysian teachers: a comparative study on teachers in daily and residential schools

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Abstract

Given the current position on teachers' professional conduct and emotional outburst in Malaysia and its impact on the students psychological well-beings, this study tries to assess emotional intelligence (EI) of Malaysian teachers. The study used a survey design and MEQI to collect data. One thousand and four teachers participated in this study. The study examines EI from four different factors (personal management, people management, spirituality and maturity) and 28 core competencies. Findings from the study show that both groups have similar EI profile. However, they have low abilities in a number of areas, namely; emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, achievement drive, influencing skills, conflict management, change catalyst, and leadership. Both groups also scored high in spirituality and maturity. In conclusion, although both groups have similar EI profile, the study shows that the residential school teachers have higher EI when compared to the daily school teachers.

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Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; EI Profiles, Teachers, MEQI

1. Introduction

Employees considered like star performers have characteristics that make them winners. They have high achievement drive (Goleman, 1995; 2001; Weisinger, 2000; Hayashi & Ewert, 2006), work as team players (Gordon, 1990; Nelson & Low, 2003; Mohd. Izham, Noriah, Siti Rahayah & Salleh, 2010), and communicate effectively (Perrone & Vickers, 2004; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005). However, many also have difficulty managing their emotion, especially when it involves the negative emotions, for example, anger and frustration (Weisinger, 1998; Sy & Cote, 2004). This could affect workplace productivity and the employees mental health (Noriah, Ramlee, Zuria & Siti Rahayah, 2006; Cherniss, 2001; Beekie, 2004; Jacobs, 2004). Emotional intelligence competencies such as; emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence, and motivation to work towards commons goals are crucial in the present, working condition. In addition, competencies such as the ability to develop others, understand others, leverage diversity, managing conflict, leadership, spiritual awareness, and maturity are also needed to navigate the challenges forced by today's complex society (Noriah *et al.*, 2006; Weisinger, 1998).

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One of the most challenging workplace is schools and studies have long shown that teaching is one of the most demanding job (Kyriacou, 1987; Borg, Riding & Falzon, 1991; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). Teachers are constantly challenged by their working environments (disruptive students, heavy workload, insensitive administrators, parents' expectation). Such environments can create psychological distress, discontentment and emotional outburst or emotional fallout among the teachers (Noriah *et al.*, 2006).

Previous studies have shown that teachers with high emotional intelligence demonstrate outstanding performance (Hayashi & Ewert, 2006; Arnold, 2005). They exhibit high empathic understanding and effective social skills. As such, they work harmoniously with all elements in their working environments. These findings support Grasher (1996) understanding of effective teachers. He suggested that excellent teachers are those who believe and empathized with their students learning needs. These teachers are enthusiastic, creative and innovative with their teaching methods. In tandem, findings from a study conducted by Noriah and Nor Shakinah (2003) show that teachers who cared for their students have higher commitment towards their teaching career. These teachers were more sensitive to their students' needs and demonstrate effective listening skills.

Empirical studies in Malaysia show that Malaysian teachers are experiencing emotional fallouts due to work demands. Studies conducted by Idris (2003) and Noriah (1994) show that the phenomenon had existed for at least two decades. Idris was able to show that the Malaysian teachers' lack positive emotions, were unable to transmit the emotions and to response positively to students' disruptive behaviors. Similarly, studies conducted by Najmuddin (2007), Rorlinda (2010), and Syafrimen (2010) show that the Malaysian teachers have low to moderate EI level, with most scored low in self-management. A study conducted by Noriah *et al.* (2006) also shows that teachers teaching in residential schools have higher EI level as compared to teachers teaching in daily schools. Although, such research is noteworthy, it has not been a research interest among Malaysian researchers working in this field. As such, more studies need to be conducted to assess the teachers' EI, and the EI core competencies that lowered the teachers EI level. Such information can help teachers' training institute develop effective interventions that promote higher EI level among the teachers. Therefore, this study aims to examine: (a) the EI profiles of teachers teaching in daily and residential schools in Malaysia, (b) the difference in EI domains among the teachers teaching in the two different schools, and (c) EI core competencies that need improvement among the two groups of teachers.

1.1 Understanding EI Construct

Although the concept of EI and its related roots has been in existence for more than half a century, debate about its conceptual definition (as well as its practical measures) has been a constant and exhausting affair. The centre of argument on EI has been on whether (a) the concept meets the criteria of scientific legitimacy, (b) the construct is measurable, and (c) the psychometric properties of existing measures of EI (Matthews, Zeidner & Roberts, 2002). Mayer and his associates (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2000; Mayer & Stevens, 1994; Mayer & Salovey, 1997) have argued strongly that EI should be defined as a set of abilities related to emotions. On the other hand, Goleman's (1995, 2001) upbeat and broader definition includes a full range of constructs which critics believe over inclusive and sweeping (Matthews *et al.*, 2002). Many researchers (Austin, 2004; Tett, Fox & Wang, 2005; Petrides & Furnham, 2001) also distinguished between trait EI and ability EI, two different EI constructs based on a self-report (typical performance as in personality questionnaires) or maximum-performance (as in IQ tests), respectively. Currently, researchers use both approaches when examining EI (Kafetsios, 2004; Ghorbani, Bing, Watson, Davidson & Mack, 2002; Zeidner, Shani-Zinovich, Matthews & Roberts, 2005).

This study chose to examine EI from Goleman's (2001) perspective. According to Goleman, EI can be measured from five domains (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and social skills). Goleman's (1995, 2001) model of EI falls under the trait approach. He argued that emotional intelligence determines ones potential for learning the practical skills based on two competencies; personal and social competencies. Personal competency has three domains (i.e., self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation) while the social competency comprises two domains; empathy and social skills. Self-awareness describes one's ability to know one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions. It has three sub-domains: emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence. The second domain, self-regulation, explain one's ability to manage one's internal states, impulses and resources. The indicators that describe this capability are self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, and innovation (Noriah *et al.*, 2006). The third domain, self-motivation, illustrates emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals. Its indicators are; achievement drive, commitment, initiative, and optimism.

Empathy and social skills describe social competency and these domains illustrates how one determines his or her ability to manage the relationship. Empathy explains understanding of others' feelings, needs, and concerns. It is the ability of accurately perceiving the experience and behavior of another person. The five sub domains that made up this group are; understanding others, developing others, service orientation, leveraging diversity, and political awareness. The eight sub-domains that characterize social skills are - influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, building bonds, collaborating and cooperation and team capabilities. However, research conducted by Noriah *et al.* (2006) shows that apart from the EI domains suggested by Goleman (2001), two additional domains should be considered in maintaining high EI. The domains are; spiritual awareness, and maturity. Spiritual awareness concerns with spiritual values that one's hold on life; and maturity describe the ability to handle life experiences and use it as a learning process. Hence, this study looked into the seven domains of EI. The researcher chose the model because it had many elements that could justify the issues of emotional stability of the Malaysian teachers.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design and Procedures

The present study used a survey method and the researcher collected the data once using an assessment tool known as Malaysian Emotional Quotient Inventory or MEQI. The researchers chose two types of schools, daily and residential schools from three different zones in Malaysia. Each school provided a name list, and the researcher chose the subjects from the name list. The researcher made appointments with the school heads to meet the teachers, and gave the assessment tool to the teachers. The teachers spend a maximum of two hours to respond to the items in the assessment tool, and the researcher collected the assessment tool after the second hour.

2.2. Sample and Population

In total, 1004 teachers teaching in daily (n=640) and residential school (n=364) participated in this study. The teachers' age range was 25 to 45, and years of service were between 5 to 15 years. The teachers were from three main ethnic groups; the Malay, Chinese, and Indian. They were randomly selected from a name list given by the participating schools located in three distinct zones in West Malaysia, namely northern, central and southern zones of West Malaysia.

2.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The instrument used in this study (Malaysian Emotional Quotient Inventory - MEQI) was developed by a group of researchers from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The instrument has 11 sections (A to K). Sections A, C, D, F, G, J, and I have items that measure domains of the perceived EI. This is a five-point Likert scale self-report section which measures the following domains; self-awareness (35 items), self-regulation (40 items), self-motivation (36 items), empathy (45 items), social skills (52 items), spirituality (9 items), and maturity (6 items). Section B, E, H, and K have items that measure emotional performance related to EI. Section B displays pictures that depict face expression and respondents identified the expression according to how they feel. Findings from a study conducted by Davies, Bishop, Manstead and Tantam (1994) shows that recognition of "correct" face expression is the most practicable way to measure EI when compared to other measures such as self-report. Section E exhibits panoramic pictures, and respondents indicated their feelings towards each of the pictures. Section H is an open-ended questions pertaining to respondents' ability to self-regulate in given situations.

In this section, respondents rated their responses according to the points given in the instruction. Finally, Section K displays 11 pictures of mazes. Respondents completed the mazes according to its level of difficulty. Reliability analysis conducted on each domain revealed values of alpha Cronbach between 0.87 to 0.97. Total reliability value for the instrument is 0.978.

3. Results

Table 1 shows means for the seven domains of EI for both, teachers teaching in residential and daily schools. Teachers teaching in the residential schools scored higher means for the first five domains (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and social skills) when compared to the teachers teaching in the daily schools. However, teachers teaching in the daily schools have higher mean for spiritual awareness and maturity as compared to the teachers teaching in the residential schools. Diagram 1 shows the emotional intelligence profile for both groups. Both profiles have the same shape.

Table 1. Means for EQ domains for residential (n=640) and daily (n=364) school teachers

	ORGNSS	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Self-Awareness	Daily School Teachers	67.81	7.86	0.31
	Residential School Teachers	71.02	7.94	0.42
Self-Regulation	Daily School Teachers	75.52	8.07	0.32
	Residential School Teachers	77.16	8.30	0.43
Self-Motivation	Daily School Teachers	73.96	9.19	0.36
	Residential School Teachers	77.00	9.63	0.50
Empathy	Daily School Teachers	76.12	8.48	0.34
	Residential School Teachers	79.08	10.55	0.55
Social Skills	Daily School Teachers	72.47	9.86	0.39
	Residential School Teachers	74.01	9.48	0.50
Spiritual Awareness	Daily School Teachers	95.04	7.69	0.31
	Residential School Teachers	91.78	9.71	0.51
Maturity	Daily School Teachers	92.31	9.00	0.36
	Residential School Teachers	87.56	10.56	0.56

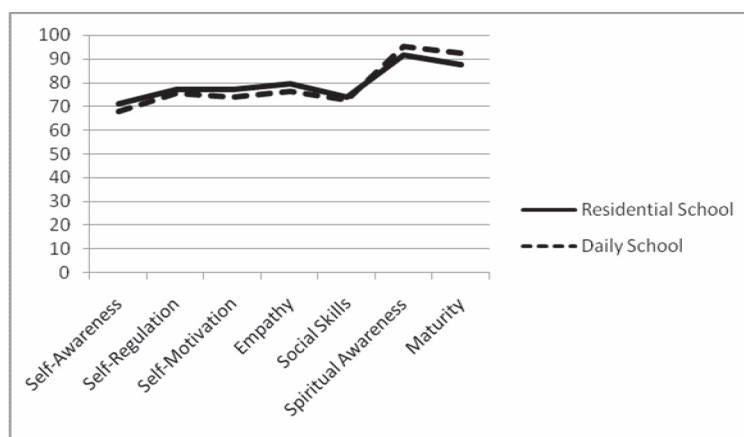


Figure 1. EQ profiles of teachers teaching in different schools

Table 2 shows the result of the t-Test conducted to examine mean differences in each domain for both groups. Except for self-motivation and social skills, the results show a significant difference in mean; self-awareness ($t=6.05$, $df=1002$, $p=0.00$), self-regulation ($t=2.16$, $df=1002$, $p=0.03$), empathy ($t=6.32$, $df=1000$, $p=0.00$), spiritual awareness ($t=5.82$, $df=982$, $p=0.00$) and maturity ($t=7.46$, $df=981$, $p=0.00$). Mean difference for both groups is highest for maturity, followed by empathy, spiritual awareness, and self-awareness. The least mean difference is for self-motivation.

Table 2. t-Test of EI domains among residential and daily school teachers

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Self-Awareness	6.05	1002.00	0.00*	3.13	0.52
Self-Regulation	2.16	1002.00	0.03*	1.16	0.54
Self-Motivation	0.54	1002.00	0.59	0.33	0.61
Empathy	6.32	1000.00	0.00*	3.86	0.61
Social Skills	1.86	998.00	0.06	1.19	0.64
Spiritual Awareness	5.82	982.00	0.00*	3.27	0.56
Maturity	7.46	981.00	0.00*	4.74	0.64

*Significant at 0.05

The study also examines 28 core-competencies of EI measured by MEQI. Findings show that both groups received low mean (less than 70%) in emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, achievement drive, influencing skills, conflict management and change catalyst. In addition, the daily school teachers also received low mean in leadership skills (please refer to Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3 : Mean for sub-domains for residential school teachers (n=364)

Domains	Sub-Domains	Mean	SD
Self-Awareness	Emotional Awareness	64.36	14.81
	Accurate Self-Assessment	63.47	9.46
	Self-Confidence	80.16	10.09
	Honesty	76.10	8.61
Self-Regulation	Self-Control	78.44	10.29
	Trustworthiness	74.54	10.63
	Responsibility	76.93	9.16
	Adaptation	77.77	10.29
	Innovation	78.12	9.91
Self-Motivation	Achievement Drive	65.41	28.64
	Commitment	84.48	10.72
	Initiative	79.66	12.29
	Interest	78.47	12.47
Empathy	Understanding Others	76.57	8.87
	Helping Others	78.41	9.48
	Leveraging Diversity	82.95	8.47
	Service Oriented	79.14	10.76
	Developing Others' Potential	78.71	9.61
	Political Awareness	79.97	9.67
	Caring	82.04	10.68
Social Skills	Influence	65.08	12.60
	Conflict Management	67.80	12.17
	Leadership	71.49	10.89
	Change Catalyst	69.71	13.04
	Building Bonds	76.87	11.23
	Collaboration and Cooperation	79.88	9.83
	Team capabilities	80.55	11.59
	Effective Communication	81.38	10.02

Table 4 : Mean for sub-domains for daily school teachers (n=640)

Domains	Sub-Domains	Mean	SD
Self-Awareness	Emotional Awareness	63.62	15.03
	Accurate Self-Assessment	59.57	10.24
	Self-Confidence	76.54	10.71
	Honesty	71.51	9.58
Self-Regulation	Self-Control	74.93	12.09
	Trustworthiness	74.35	10.81
	Responsibility	74.97	9.35
	Adaptation	75.52	10.33
	Innovation	77.85	9.47
Self-Motivation	Achievement Drive	56.46	28.00
	Commitment	83.17	10.59
	Initiative	78.85	13.23
	Interest	77.36	12.95
Empathy	Understanding Others	72.25	10.08
	Helping Others	74.34	9.87
	Leveraging Diversity	79.40	10.57
	Service Oriented	75.75	12.23
	Developing Others' Potential	75.43	11.88
	Political Awareness	77.53	10.39
	Caring	78.11	12.45
Social Skills	Influence	62.94	11.94
	Conflict Management	63.93	11.85
	Leadership	69.89	11.31
	Change Catalyst	69.97	12.42
	Building Bonds	75.64	11.86
	Collaboration and Cooperation	78.09	9.84
	Team capabilities	79.14	13.27
	Effective Communication	80.17	11.15

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Findings from this study show that both groups of teachers have similar EI profiles. When both groups have similar profiles, it could mean that both groups have similar strength and weakness in EI domains. However, teachers teaching in the residential schools have higher mean for the first five EI domain (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and social skills) as compared to the teachers teaching in the daily schools who have higher mean for spiritual awareness and maturity. These findings could indicate that residential school teachers deal with high-ability students whose learning needs is different from the daily school students. It could also indicate that teaching residential schools is more challenging than daily schools. Finally, it could also indicate that residential schools teachers have to meet extremely high expectations from school administrators and Ministry of Education to help students excel in their academic work. Since this study subsumes EI as traits, therefore, it explains behavioral dispositions that concerns with one's ability to identify, process and utilize emotion-laden information (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Goleman (1995) suggested that EI determines one's capacity for learning the practical skills. Concomitantly, these residential school teachers learn how to develop skills; to be aware of their own feelings, to

motivate themselves to teach and to manage their own feelings. They also learn how to develop empathic understanding and effective social skills better than the daily school teachers.

The researcher also examined each EI domains microscopically, and the results show that the teachers have low average in a number of EI core-competencies; emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, achievement drive, influencing skills, conflict management and change catalyst. In addition, the daily school teachers also have low average for leadership. Emotional awareness and accurate self-assessment both are under the self-awareness domain. These are two most notable core-competencies within the domain that help the teachers develop the ability to differentiate their internal states, preferences, resources and intuitions (Goleman, 1995). Low mean in these competencies suggest that the teachers were unable to identify their own feelings, assess those feelings (especially feelings that have a negative impact on students) and the resources they have to overcome negative feelings. Lack of these competencies could lead to emotional outburst. According to McCaughtry and Rovegno (2003) and McDowelle and Bell (1997) teachers' emotional outburst, only intensified the students' negative feelings about their lack of success, and this brings about the domino effect from teachers to students. It is fascinating to note that information from this study supports the Malaysian media reports on teachers' behaviors and their negative impact on students. Although the teachers were extremely committed to their work, they were also found to have low achievement drive. According to Goleman (1995), individuals with low achievement drive, would not be able to reach their full potentials and subsequently, would not be able to achieve their goals. High achievement drive differentiate individuals with high potential to succeed and those with less likely to succeed.

The findings also show that the teachers have low average for three other core-competencies; influence, conflict management and change catalyst. These are core-competencies under the social skills domain. In general, teachers who lack social skills will not be able support healthy physical, mental and emotional development among their students. A study conducted by Noriah *at el.* (2006) supported this statement which shows that teachers experience low social skills development, and generate negative values towards other. In this study, the evidence are extremely useful in order to understand how teachers' deal with disruptive students. Lack of these two competencies also suggests that the teachers lack effective classroom management. Low mean in change catalyst could also indicate that the teachers were not proactive in their teaching strategies and were not risk-takers. The daily school teachers were also found to have low average for leadership. This shows that they were not given the opportunity to develop leadership skills. It could also mean that the daily school teachers' work is dull and non-challenging. They routinely teach students in the classroom without helping them explore new knowledge in a more challenging environment. It could also indicate that the teachers were less empowered by the school administrators, or the daily schools lack positions that enable leadership to emerge.

4.1 Implication towards Professional Development

As suggested by Weisinger (1998), EI is not a trait, but it can be natured, developed, and augmented. It is not static but can be acquired and improved over time. Therefore, teachers in general need to know about EI and how it explains their emotional outburst. Such information should be embedded into the teacher trainees' curriculum program. McDowelle and Bell (1997) posit that educational leadership training programs should systematically and intentionally include information on EI. Planned activities that emphasize on team building, networking, conflict-management, and negotiation should be included in the training curriculum. This will enhance teachers' teaching skills and help them increase and maintain their EI.

Since learning involves life-long activities, one could have embedded development of EI across those activities over time. In teachers' training program, a standalone course can be conducted to help the teacher trainees learn how to develop EI and apply the skills associated to it effectively. Information on EI can also be embedded into the existing psychology course. The in-service teachers, however, can benefit from short courses conducted over the weekends. This weekend workshop should be skill-based, and teachers should be taught how to manage themselves and others in their working environment. Such courses are valuable because it allows teachers to be more aware of their own feelings and its impact on others, especially their students. It also allows them to identify their strengths and limitations, self-worth and capabilities that will enhance their confidence.

4.2 Suggestion for Future Research

Research on EI among teachers are extremely rare and far in between. The present research itself is one of the few researches on EI conducted on Malaysian teachers. However, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has recommended the need to look into EI, and to integrate it with the teachers' training curriculum. It is, therefore, appropriate that more researchers interested in EI conduct their studies to examine not only the general EI profiles of the teachers, but more importantly, the core-competencies within EI needed in the teaching profession.

Goleman (2001) and Weisinger (1998) also suggested that development of EI is similar to stacking, building blocks from the ground. The question to ponder is, at what level should the EI development occurs within one's learning curve. Therefore, future researchers should conduct longitudinal studies that examine the level of EI development among teachers. In lieu of the fact that quality teachers beget quality students; therefore, future research should also focus on emotional intelligence of the students and examine if their emotional intelligence mirrors their teachers. Finally, yet importantly, researcher should also examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, commitment to the teaching profession and attachment to the organization among teachers with different level of EI. This can help promote better understanding about how these teachers interact with their teaching environments.

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