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Resilience And Cognitive Styles Among Pre And Post-Independence Generations In Malaysia

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Abstract

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country and achieved her independence in 1957. After independence, Malaysia continued to develop various aspects that economically, socially, politically and cultural experiences. Changes that occurred after independence, has made this study crucial in understanding differences between the generations of pre and post independence in terms of certain psychological constructs. Hence, this study attempts to examine the differences in resilience and cognitive styles among these generations. A total of 552 respondents comprising of 261 born before 1957 and 291 born after 1957 took part in this study. Resilience Scale was used to measure resilience level and GEFT (Group Embedded Figures Test) for cognitive styles. Results indicated that there were significant difference in cognitive style between these groups but no significant difference were found in resilience. Implications of this study were discussed.

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Keywords: Resilience, cognitive styles, field dependence/independence, generations

1. Introduction

Malaysia as a multi racial country continues to develop in numerous aspects whether economically, socially, politically and psychologically. After its independence, the populations would differ in terms of their values,
personality, motivations, thinking styles and also resiliency. Hence, this study seeks to understand the diverse cognitive styles that may ultimately have an impact on the resiliency and the functioning of the individuals that would have significant contributions to the productivity and well being of the generations. It is extremely necessary and important to deeply explore and explain these two psychological constructs in order to understand the difference between the pre and post-independence generations.

There are several theories of cognitive styles developed by Sigel and Coop, 1974; Beihler, 1978; Witkin and Goodenough, 1981. Cognitive styles are also being associated with the learning environment. Cognitive styles by Witkin & Goodenough (1981) studied on the perceptions of individuals in different spatial orientation, which refers to field dependence and field independence. Field dependence/independence measures the degree to which an individual uses “an analytical as opposed to a global way of experiencing an environment” (Keefe, 1979). According to Sim and Sim (2006), field dependent individuals engage a global organization of the surrounding field, and perceived parts of the field as fluent while, field independent learners discern discrete parts of the field, distinct from the organized background. On the other hand, field dependent learners depend on cues and structure from their environment and then make the learning process contingent on their experiences in that environment (Sim and Sim, 2006). Field dependent learners are also viewed as having short attention span, are usually easily distracted, and prefer learning environment that are casual. In addition, field dependent learners choose instructional situations that elicit their feelings and experiences (Sim and Sim, 2006). Wooldridge (1995) viewed field dependent persons tend to be more socially oriented, less achievement-oriented and less competitive, than field independent individuals while, field independent individuals, known as analytical learners tend to be more independent, more intrinsically motivated, and task-oriented in their learning processes. Field independent learners are also said to be more focused and disciplined learners and they are characterized by a longer attention span and a greater contemplative disposition than field dependent learners (Sim and Sim, 2006). Thus, field independent individuals depend more on internal than external cues, and prefer formal learning environments conducive to their competitive and achievement-oriented learning style (Witkin et. al, 1971; Witkin et. al, 1977; Witkin and Goodenough, 1981; Wooldridge, 1995).

Resilience is described as a kind of positive mental quality, which can help individuals to buffer or resist the negative effects which are induced by stress, crisis or trauma, and promote their adjustment and thriving. Resilient individuals are determined people and can enhance efforts to adapt successfully in times of difficult situations or adversities. Zimmerman and Arunkumar (1994) described resiliency as “the ability to spring back from adversity that interpret the trajectory from risk to problem behavior or psychopathology and thereby result in adaptive outcomes even in the presence of challenging and threatening circumstances.

Cognitive theory has revealed means of which individuals can be more resilient in ways of processing information (Ahangar, 2010). Goleman (1996) stated that an individual’s brain parts combine their energies in order to synergistically give rise to the new facet that is, resilience.

2.0 Research Objectives

This study aims to examine

1. The relationship between resilience and cognitive styles
2. The differences of resilience between pre and post independence generations
3. The differences of cognitive styles between pre and post independence generations

3.0 Materials and Methods

This research employed a survey design with the use of two sets of questionnaire that measure resilience and cognitive styles. A total of 552 respondents took part in this study, which comprised of 261 pre independence generations (born before 1957) and 291 from post independence generations (born after 1957). Two instruments were used: (i) The Resilience Scale comprised of 30 items and (ii) The Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) that measure field dependence and field independence. In GEFT (Group Embedded Figure Test), subjects are asked to locate a previously seen simple figure embedded within a larger, more complex figure. The test is scored on the basis of the total number of simple forms correctly traced. Scores may range from zero to eighteen (MacNeil, 1980).
Persons with lower scores are said to be field dependent.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the results of the correlations between resilience and cognitive styles. The results indicated that there were significant positive correlations between resilience and cognitive styles for pre independence generations with $r = 0.152^*$, while result found negative correlations for post independence generations with $r = -0.193^*$. Hence, this correlation implies that for pre independence generations, high resilient individuals are more field independent, which means they are more independent, more intrinsically motivated, and task-oriented in their learning processes. Field independent learners are also said to be more focused and disciplined learners and they are characterized by a longer attention span. As for post independence generations, correlations of high resilience are field dependence, which means that they are more socially oriented and inclined to gain more social support from others. (Ahangar, 2010). Being socially oriented persons reveals more resiliency and adaptive to be in control when faced with uncertainty. This finding supported Ahangar (2010) that students having good resilience skills might be having strong social support and they would be more confident and alert to the role of emotions in everyday life. They are more knowledgeable in developing strategies in problem solving of daily activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Pre independence</th>
<th>Post independence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>0.152*</td>
<td>-0.193*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive styles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows the results of t-test to examine the differences of resilience based on pre and post independences generations. The findings indicated that there was no significant differences of resilience between pre and post independence generations with $t = -1.69$, $p > 0.05$. This means that for both pre and post independence generations do not differ in their levels of resilience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Generations</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Pre-independence</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>138.48</td>
<td>19.42</td>
<td>495.83</td>
<td>-1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-independence</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>141.03</td>
<td>15.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p > 0.05$

Table 3 shows the results of t-test to examine the differences of cognitive styles based on pre and post independences generations. The findings indicated that there was a significant differences of cognitive styles between pre and post independence generations with $t = -8.22$, $p < 0.05$. This indicates that post independence generations scored higher of the field more independence cognitive styles than the pre independence generations.

These findings also means that field independent individuals, known as analytical learners tend to be more independent, more intrinsically motivated, and task-oriented in their learning processes. Field independent learners are also said to be more focused and disciplined learners and they are characterized by a longer attention span and a
greater contemplative disposition (Sim and Sim, 2006). In addition, field independent individuals depend more on internal than external cues, and prefer formal learning environments conducive to their competitive and achievement-oriented learning style (Witkin et. al, 1971; Witkin et. al, 1977; Witkin and Goodenough, 1981; Wooldridge, 1995).

Table 2: T-test results on the differences of cognitive styles based on pre and post independence generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Generations</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive styles</td>
<td>Pre-independence</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>-8.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-independence</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>10.56</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p <0.05

5.0 Conclusion

This study explores the correlations between resilience and cognitive styles among two different generations is considered vital because understanding cognitive styles may lead individuals to develop accurate beliefs about the world and appropriate strategies that may result in valuable resilience resources. Adversity and daily stress cannot be prevented, but efforts should be made for individuals to learn to be more resilient by changing how one’s think about challenges and adversities.

References


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