

The level of Emotional Intelligence among Administrative Staff in Higher Learning Institution

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the level of emotional intelligence (EI) among administrative staff, and to explore whether there are significant statistical differences in their EI based on staff's gender, age and position. This study focused on the administrative staff of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) who deal with students and guests from different countries. A total of 186 valid questionnaires survey were gathered from male and female administrative staff selected using stratified random sampling. To achieve the study objectives, descriptive analyses, 2-way ANOVA and MANOVA analyses were used. The results revealed that the level of EI among administrative staff was high on the total scale scores and its dimensions. The findings also showed that there were statistically significant differences in EI total scores based on gender and age, while no significant differences due to position. Furthermore, there were significant differences in self-emotional appraisal (SEA) and others' emotional appraisal (OEA) based on gender; and self-emotional appraisal (SEA) and regulation of emotion (ROE) based on age. However, all other differences were not significance. This study extends current research on EI and explaining its importance in the context of higher learning institutions.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence (EI); Administrative staff; Higher learning institutions.

Jel Classification Codes: M12, I23, L84

ملخص: تهدف هذه الدراسة الى بحث مستوى الذكاء العاطفي بين موظفي الإدارة في الجامعة، ودراسة ما إذا كانت هناك فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في ذكائهم العاطفي و هذا على أساس جنس الموظف، العمر والمنصب. هذه الدراسة ركزت على الموظفين الإداريين الذين يعملون في الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية في ماليزيا، الذين يتعاملون مع طلاب وزبائن من بلدان مختلفة. تم جمع ما مجموعه 186 استبياناً صالحاً من الموظفين ذكور وإناث تم اختيارهم باستخدام العينة العشوائية الطبقية. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة تم استخدام التحليلات الإحصائية كالأحصاءات الوصفية، اختبار تحليل التباين الثنائي وتحليل التباين المتعدد. وكشفت النتائج أن مستوى الذكاء العاطفي لدى الموظفين الإداريين كان مرتفعاً في درجة المقياس الإجمالي للذكاء العاطفي ودرجات عناصره الأربعة. وفيما يخص عناصر الذكاء العاطفي، أظهرت النتائج على وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في مستوى الذكاء العاطفي على أساس الجنس والعمر، في حين لا توجد فروق على أساس المنصب. وعلاوة على هذا، كانت هناك اختلافات كبيرة في التقييم العاطفي الذاتي والتقييم العاطفي للآخرين على أساس الجنس؛ والتقييم العاطفي الذاتي وتنظيم العاطفة على أساس السن. في حين أنه، لا يوجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في باقي العلاقات. وتعتبر هذه الدراسة كامتداد للبحوث الحالية المتعلقة بمصطلح الذكاء العاطفي وشرح أهميته في محيط مؤسسات التعليم العالي.

الكلمات المتاحية: الذكاء العاطفي، موظفي الإدارة، مؤسسات التعليم العالي.

تصنيف Jel: L84, I23, M12

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I- Introduction:

The complexities of work environment have required organizations to invest in their employees' skills and competencies. When students choose to study abroad, they are not only expecting excellent teaching, they are also anticipating superb service from university management. In the university the service is provided by employees who are required to interact in a positive manner to ensure customer satisfaction, perception of service quality, and positive word-of-mouth. Students who receive good service from employees are likely to spend more time using the service, be more willing to return, and recommend the service to others¹. However, the perceived quality of service is often determined by the manner in which service employees not only act and speak with the customer but also how they regulate their feelings².

One of the important habitual patterns of behavior is emotion. The staff of a university involved in delivering services to students and guests require providing their work with appropriate emotions. However, the interaction with students stimulate a series of emotional demands that healthcare employees have to manage. This what make emotional expression in higher education context more meaningful than other contexts. Because staff need to manage and control their own and other's emotions during interaction which may lead to face conflicting emotions³. Therefore, higher education context is a unique setting within which the role of emotion now needs further attention. Getting emotional agenda wrong in this context may costs both staff and students. Thus, to understand how employees provide an expected service to customers, recent researchers have increasingly paid attention to the role of emotional intelligence (EI) as the act of controlling and managing employees' emotional display and understand own and other's feelings. To add to the body of knowledge, this study aims to examine the level of EI among administrative staff in one of the Malaysian higher institutions and testing how do administrative staff's EI differ by gender, age and position.

II- Literature review:

II-1. Emotional intelligence (EI)

The term 'emotional intelligence'⁴ is a relatively newer construct which continues to be a popular approach to understanding how emotions are experienced in the workplace and its impact on employees' outcomes. It is considered to be an asset in contexts where it is important to understand other people. Mayer and Salovey's (1997)⁵ define EI as a set of interrelated skills concerning the four dimensions of EI that could be a massive asset to employee activities^{6,7}. The definition proposes that EI is a concept composed of four dimensions: the ability to perceive and express emotions, the ability to use emotions to facilitate thought, the ability to understand emotions, and the ability to regulate emotions. Emotionally intelligent employees may be more aware of their feelings and those of others. Consequently, they may perform effectively because they have high EI⁸. Furthermore, different types of organisational members have a different level of EI. For example, in service settings, it is crucial for employees to understand customers' perspectives and engage in relationships that will facilitate successful interactions. When employees develop insight and a deeper understanding of what drives others, they become more emotionally resilient and able to influence others⁹.

Wong and Law (2002)⁶ and Law et al. (2004)⁷ used a definition of EI similar to Mayer and Salovey' (1997)⁵ definition mentioned above. The definition proposed that EI is a concept

composed of four dimensions: the appraisal and expression of self-emotions, the appraisal and recognition of emotions in others, the regulation of self-emotion, and the use of emotions¹⁰. As a result, Wang and Law developed emotional intelligence scale (WLEIS) to measure EI. The scale was designed to be used in organization¹¹. It includes four dimensions: self-emotion appraisal (SEA), others' emotion appraisal (OEA), regulation of emotion (ROE) and use of emotion (UOE). This scale measures individual differences in the ability to identify and regulate emotions in the self and others. It is based on the ability model that has been utilized and supported by many researchers who considered it as a solid measure with sounds of validity and reliability^{11,12,13,14}. Therefore, the current study also uses Wang and Law scale (WLEIS) to measure EI.

II.2. Emotional intelligence (EI) in higher education

Higher education like many other service contexts such as hospitality and healthcare have emotional requirements. As such, the ability of staff to meet these requirements is essential. When students choose to study at the university, they are not only expecting excellent teaching or learning process, they are also anticipating high service provision. In university, staff are required to interact in a positive manner with their students to ensure customer satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth^{15,16}. In order to make sure that students are satisfied, staffs need to manage their emotions and be empathetic with them. As a result, researchers have identified EI competencies as very important for high quality services in higher education context. For example, Vandervoort (2006)¹⁷ illustrated that having high EI among staff may affect work environment and improve the service interaction. EI has been recognized for the case of academic staff and student^{18,19,20,21}. On the other hand, few works have shown the importance of EI on other workforce such as administrative staff²². Therefore, this study focuses on administrative staff workforce who dealing with students and guests from different countries.

II.3. The level of EI and demographic variables

Previous research investigating the differences in EI based on gender, age and position have not reached decisive results. In terms of the participants' gender, some researchers believe that female experienced emotions more than male^{20,23}, exceptions included few studies when male reported to be more likely to score higher on EI than female^{24,25}. For example, Ghani and Mohd Zain (2014)²⁴ showed significant differences in favor of male staff. While Kumar and Muniandi (2012)²⁰ found no significance differences in the level of EI due to gender. Furthermore, age is believed to be related with the level of EI. Researchers found that there is a positive relationship between age and the level of EI^{18,20,26}. A research revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of EI based on age²⁰. However, a study by Shi and Wang (2007)¹⁸ on Chinese students concluded that there is no significance difference between the level of EI and age. Moreover, researchers mentioned that occupational level or the position of employees in organization may impact EI differently^{20,26}. These studies revealed a statistically significant differences in EI level due to position. Researchers believed that EI level does vary with gender, age and position, however, more research are needed to study this link.

III- Methods

A representative sample of male and female administrative staff from 39 departments, offices, divisions, and faculties in IIUM were selected from a population of 1000. The study used stratified

random sampling to select the candidates from that population. Out of 315 questionnaires administered, only 186 valid questionnaires were returned, and the overall response rate was 59.04%. Descriptive analyses, univariate and multivariate analyses were conducted by using IBM SPSS version 22.

III-1. Measure

To measure emotional intelligence (EI), the study used the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) developed by Wong and Law (2002). The scale composed of four dimensions: self-emotion appraisal (SEA), others' emotion appraisal (OEA), regulation of emotion (ROE) and use of emotion (UOE). The scale consists of 16 items in a five-point Likert scale type where (1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The measurement scale was translated from English into Malay to help Malaysian administrative staff answer the questionnaire more consistently.

IV-Data Analysis and Findings

IV-1. Demographics

The total number of respondents is 189. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents based on the various demographic variables. In terms of gender, 124 respondents were female, and 62 were male. The distribution of the respondents according to age shows that 63 respondents were in the 20-29 age group, 66 were aged 30-39, 45 were aged 40-49, 9 were aged 50-59, and only one respondent was aged more than 59 years. As for marital status, most respondents were married status which comprised 61.8% while 36.6% are single, and the remaining 1.1% and 0.5% are divorced and widowed respectively. The respondents' job position was 129 from administrative support, 31 executives, 9 were senior executives and 17 of the respondents with others. The respondents with secondary level of education background were 58, 51 with a diploma, 55 with a bachelor's degree, 17 with a master's degree, and 3 with a PhD degree. In terms of the duration of working experience, 92 of the respondents had more than 10 years working experience, and 94 had less than 10 years.

IV-2. Reliability

Concerning the Cronbach's alpha of the emotional intelligence (EI) scale, the Cronbach's alpha for the entire sample was 0.919. While the results for each dimension are as follows: 0.853 for self-emotion appraisal (SEA), 0.890 for others' emotion appraisal (OEA), 0.832 for regulation of emotion (ROE) and for 0.920 for use of emotion (UOE).

IV-3. Descriptive analyses

Descriptive statistics were conducted to examine the level of EI among administrative staff in one of the higher learning institutions, means and standard deviation (SD) were determined for the total score and the four dimensions. Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics.

Table 2 shows that the mean for the total scale was (4.02; SD= 0.53), which reflected a high level of emotional intelligence among administrative staff. The highest means among EI

dimensions is self-emotion appraisal (SEA) by mean (4.21) and standard deviation SD (0.59), followed by regulation of emotion (ROE) by mean (4.19; SD= 0.63). Use of emotion (UOE) is the third dimension by mean (3.94; SD= 0.73), while the last dimension is others' emotion appraisal (OEA) by mean (3.75; SD= 0.71). The mean of each dimensions also reflected a high level of emotional intelligence (EI) (see figure 1).

To investigate the possible significance differences in emotional intelligence (EI) among administrative staff, the means and standard deviations for total scores and EI dimensions based on gender, age and position were calculated (see table 3).

As shown in Table 3, some differences exist in EI scores based on variations in gender, age and position. To test the significance of these differences, this research used univariate analysis (2-way ANOVA).

IV-4. Univariate analysis

Table 4 shows the significance differences in administrative staff 's level of EI based on gender, age and position.

The results revealed that there are statistical differences in EI scores due to gender ($F= 4.42$, $P= 0.03$) and age ($F= 2.74$, $P= 0.02$), while no differences on EI due to position ($F= 0.50$, $P= 0.68$).

IV-5. Multivariate analysis

This study examined the possibility of significant differences in EI dimensions among administrative staff based on gender, age and position. To test the significance of these differences, MANOVA was used as shown in table 5.

Results of table 5 shows significant differences for SEA ($F= 4.40$, $P= 0.03$) and OEA ($F= 5.51$, $P= 0.02$) that refer to gender variable, in favor of female administrative staff as shown in table 3. Furthermore, there are significant differences for administrative staff 's SEA ($F= 2.29$, $P= 0.04$) and ROE ($F= 3.23$, $P= 0.00$), in favor of more than 50 years old administrative staff. All other differences were not significance.

V- Discussion

This study examined the level of emotional intelligence (EI) among administrative staff and whether significant statistical differences exist in the staff's EI and EI components based on some of demographic variables (gender, age and position). The results reveal a high mean value among administrative staff in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). These results indicate that the staff in this university display their EI capability in their job. Results of the current study complement the findings of previous studies in the context of higher education^{20,22,25}. These studies concluded mean values of EI between average and high. These maybe due to the training and development programs conducted by the university to improve the staff skills and abilities. Once a high level of EI is developed, the staff will be able to understand work relationship, maintain emotional calm and reduce negative attitudes in the work place²⁶. However, without the capability to understand our and other emotions, staff will not be able to control and minimise their negative emotions and will face difficult situations when interacting with the public^{13,28}. Therefore, the university management should continue their strategy to help staff to make change in EI development.

Data analysis shows that EI dimensions also scored high mean values. Self-emotion appraisal (SEA) is the highest level of abilities among the four EI dimensions. The second and third level of abilities are regulation of emotion (ROE) and use of emotion (UOE) respectively. The lowest level was other emotion appraisal (OEA). This means that the ability to deal with individual own emotions is high among the university staff⁷. They are able to understand, express, regulate and use of their own emotions. However, they are low in perceiving and understanding the other emotions. These results are consistent with previous research^{18,23}.

All these abilities have been practiced well by both male and female respondents in this university, with a concern for their age groups and their different positions. In reference to gender, EI of the female were slightly higher than male administrative staffs. Previous studies illustrated that male tend to have lower EI than female^{20,24}. The results also showed that there are statistical differences in EI based on gender in the total scale score and in the SEA and OEA in favour of females, but there was no statistical difference in the ROE and UOE dimensions. Female in general seem to have advantage in expression of emotions and recognition of emotions in others as compared to male²⁹. Previous research has revealed similar results (e.g. Marembo and Chinyamurindi, 2018)³⁰.

Furthermore, in reference to the second demographic variable, results illustrated that there were statistical differences in EI total score, SEA and ROE scores due to age groups. While there were no statistical differences in OEA and UOE scores. The findings of this study support the previous research^{20,26,31}, as there were significant differences on staff's emotional intelligence based on their age groups. Researchers confirmed that EI may increase with age³¹. Goleman (1998)³³ and Reid (2009)³⁴ claimed that the development of individual's EI increases with maturity. In addition, Chen et al.'s (2015)³⁰ study illustrated that individual age effects on EI and emotional intelligence's dimensions across cultures. The finding was confirmed in this study with the Malaysian culture. According to Petrides and Furnham (2006)²⁴, the differences between age groups in the workplace come from the differences in the experiences, responsibilities and the level of challenges they face in their job. Older administrative staff may acquire higher EI due to long term learning.

Moreover, differences in the levels of EI amongst administrative staff were observed based on the occupational position. The senior executive had a higher mean of EI and emotional intelligence's dimensions than any other position grades. However, position grades do not show a significance differences in the level of EI. Thus, this research illustrated that different occupational grades did not influence administrative staff's EI. The results of this study are contrary to the findings of past research^{20,26}. This finding maybe explained in line with the assumption that the staff may not understand the term 'emotional intelligence' itself and how it could be valuable for them in the workplace²⁰. However, based on Moore's (2009)²⁸ study, person with higher position in organization may own high level of EI and will be able to lead change and identify successful practices among their staff.

VI-Conclusion

This study focused on the administrative staff working in the one of the higher learning institutions in Malaysia, some of their demographic variables and their EI levels. In line with the objectives of this study, most of the variables did not collectively significantly influence the level of EI and emotional intelligence's dimensions amongst administrative staff. However, the levels of EI differences among them were observed. In spite of having high level of EI among

administrative staff, it is still necessary to ensure that EI is completely understood and increasingly valued in the workplace in the future. University management have to improve the staff well-being to encourage them to employ EI skills⁶. They can conduct training in individual development so that administrative staff can have better control in identifying and understanding their own and others' emotions. The university can benefit a lot from the performing of EI. Therefore, administrative staff who deal with local and foreign students and guests could improve their EI to ensure a better service interaction.

The current study has a several limitations and raises a few ideas for future research. First, this study was conducted in the one of the higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Further studies should be carried out in several universities to analyze a broad base of administrative staff. Large population may help to investigate demographic variables differences more accurately. Second, this study only included three demographic variables, which do not represent all the factors that may influence EI. Future studies should examine the level of EI based on other variables such as work experience and level of education.

VII- Appendices:

Table (1): Frequencies of demographic variables

Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	62	33.3
Female	124	66.7
Marital status		
Single	68	36.6
Married	115	61.8
Others	3	1.6
Level of education		
Secondary	58	31.2
Diploma	51	27.4
Degree	55	29.6
Master	17	9.1
PhD	3	1.6
Other	2	1.1
Age		
Less than 20	2	1.1
20 – 29	63	33.9
30 – 39	66	35.5
40 – 49	45	24.2
50 – 59	9	4.8
More than 59	1	0.5
Total working experience		
> 10 years	94	50.5
≤ 10 years	92	49.5
Position		
Senior executive	9	4.8
Executive	31	16.7
Administrative	129	69.4
Others	17	9.1

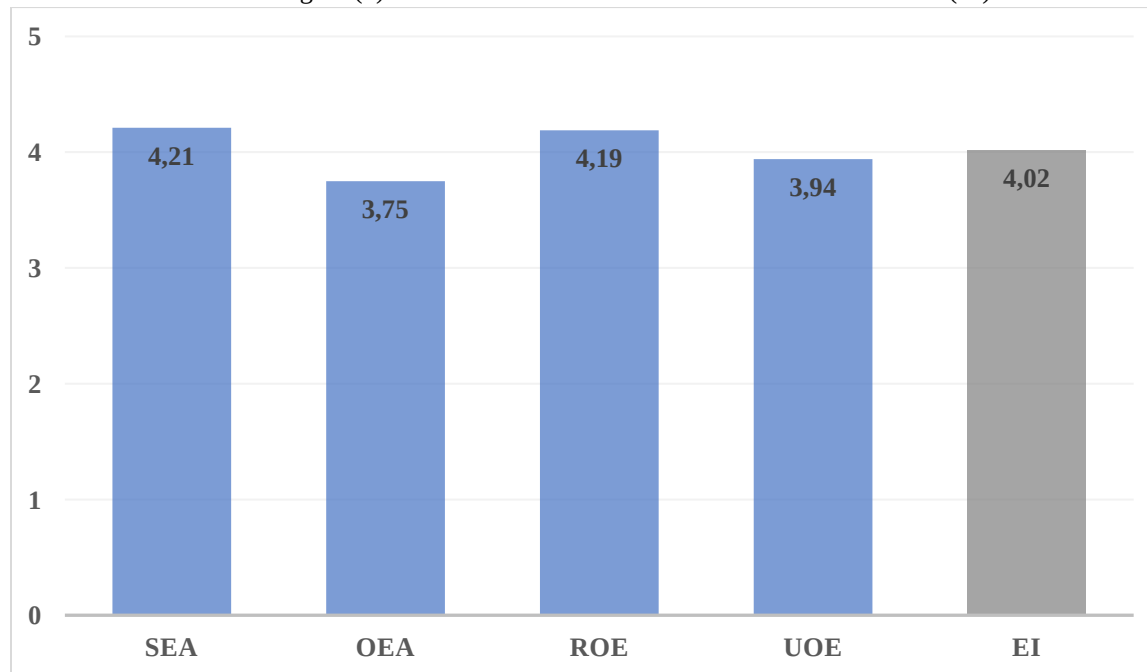
The source: Results from SPSS analyses

Table (2): Means and standard deviation for EI

Dimensions	Means	Standard Deviation	Level
Self-emotion appraisal (SEA)	4.21	0.59	High
Others' emotion appraisal (OEA)	3.75	0.71	High
Regulation of emotion (ROE)	4.19	0.63	High
Use of emotion (UOE)	3.94	0.73	High
Total scale (EI)	4.02	0.53	High

The source: Results from SPSS analyses

Figure (1): The mean score for each dimension and total mean (EI)



The source: Prepared by the researchers

Table (3): Means and standard deviation for EI scores based on gender, age and position

Variables			SEA	OEA	ROE	UOE	EI
Gender	Male	Mean	4.19	3.63	4.18	3.98	4.00
		SD	0.55	0.74	0.70	0.79	0.52
	Female	Mean	4.22	3.80	4.19	3.92	4.04
		SD	0.61	0.69	0.60	0.70	0.52
Age	Less 20	Mean	3.62	4.12	4.00	4.00	3.93
		SD	0.17	0.17	0.35	0.00	0.08
	20-29	Mean	4.09	3.63	4.05	3.77	3.89
		SD	0.62	0.83	0.73	0.86	0.58
	30-39	Mean	4.17	3.71	4.09	3.89	3.97
		SD	0.61	0.60	0.58	0.68	0.50
	40-49	Mean	4.36	3.83	4.46	4.15	4.20
		SD	0.47	0.67	0.48	0.55	0.40
	50-59	Mean	4.55	4.16	4.58	4.38	4.42
		SD	0.55	0.78	0.43	0.53	0.53
	More 59	Mean	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.37
		SD	/	/	/	/	/
Position	Senior executive	Mean	4.41	4.02	4.55	4.08	4.27
		SD	0.71	0.83	0.64	0.88	0.63

Executive	Mean	4.24	3.82	4.37	3.97	4.10
	SD	0.59	0.60	0.63	0.62	0.47
Admin Support	Mean	4.20	3.70	4.12	3.93	3.99
	SD	0.58	0.72	0.61	0.76	0.53
Others	Mean	4.07	3.79	4.23	3.85	3.98
	SD	0.60	0.78	0.68	0.62	0.47

The source: Results from SPSS analyses

Table (4): 2-way ANOVA test on EI due to gender, age and position

Source of variance	SS	df	F	P
Gender	1.18	1	4.42	0.03*
Age	3.67	5	2.74	0.02*
Position	0.40	3	0.50	0.68
Error	42.01	157		
Total	3063.43	186		

* Significant at ($P < 0.05$)

The source: Results from SPSS analyses

Table (5): MANOVA test on EI dimensions due to gender, age and position

Independent variables	Dependent variables	SS	df	F	P
Gender	SEA	1.45	1	4.40	0.03*
	OEA	2.82	1	5.51	0.02*
	ROE	0.38	1	1.04	0.30
	UOE	0.71	1	1.27	0.26
Age	SEA	3.78	5	2.29	0.04*
	OEA	4.41	5	1.72	0.13
	ROE	5.97	5	3.23	0.00*
	UOE	3.97	5	1.41	0.22
Position	SEA	0.39	3	0.39	0.75
	OEA	1.40	3	0.91	0.43
	ROE	1.67	3	1.50	0.21
	UOE	0.10	3	0.06	0.98
Error	SEA	51.74	157		
	OEA	80.39	157		
	ROE	58.02	157		
	UOE	87.99	157		
Total	SEA	3361.75	186		
	OEA	2708.43	186		
	ROE	3345.62	186		
	UOE	2993.56	186		

* Significant at ($P < 0.05$)

The source: Results from SPSS analyses

VIII- References:

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