

# Self-Esteem, Mental Health and Emotional Intelligence in a Malaysian Private Higher Learning Institution

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## **Abstract**

### **Purpose:**

To examine the relationship between self-esteem and mental health towards the level of emotional intelligence among students in a Malaysian private higher learning institution.

### **Design/methodology/approach:**

Data were collected by distributing a total of 278 questionnaires to final year and penultimate year students. The questionnaire contains questions on demographic information, personality traits and emotional intelligence. The variables are adopted from past studies and measured using five points Likert scale, ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”.

### **Findings:**

Students in the private higher learning institution has acceptable level of self-esteem, mental health and emotional intelligence. The results show that self-esteem and mental health has significant positive relationship with level of emotional intelligence, indicating that students with better self-esteem and mental health has a greater level of emotional intelligence.

### **Research limitations/implications:**

This study only covers final year and penultimate year students in a private higher learning institution, hence, the results could not be generalized to all students in Malaysia. If the sample size is larger, more parametric tests can be conducted and the results would be more interesting.

### **Practical implications:**

Universities, professional bodies or employers may take initiatives to instill the students’ self-esteem and mental health in order to enhance their emotional intelligence as they are the future leaders.

### **Originality/value:**

There is a lack of studies on self-esteem, mental health and emotional intelligence conducted in Malaysia. The findings contribute to literatures on the determinants of emotional intelligence among students in a Malaysian private higher learning institution.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Self-Esteem, Mental Health, Higher Learning Institution, Malaysia

## **Introduction**

There has been a considerable interest on how personality traits influence emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to accurately identify and understand one's own emotional reactions and those of others, the ability to control one's emotions, and to use them to form good decisions, act purposefully and involve effectively in a given situation (Sameer, 2008). In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, total success is also measured through emotional intelligence rather than only intellectual intelligence (Sulaiman, 2013). Students and youngsters are often face with challenges during their campus life, hence, require positive self-esteem and mental health. The ability of emotions self-control is crucial for not carried away by the flow of negative elements. Therefore, a good level of emotional intelligence helps to maintain a state of harmonies and finally students will become more confident in dealing with challenges of living and learning in educational institutions (Rohana, Kamaruzaman & Zanariah, 2009).

Previous researchers had conducted studies regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and personality traits. For instance, study of emotional intelligence towards mental health among college students (Gupta & Kumar, 2010) and the study of emotional intelligence towards self-esteem (Abbas & Junaid, 2011). Meanwhile, past study had mentioned that accounting academics and practitioners need emotional intelligence training to develop their interpersonal skills (Cook, Bay, Visser, Myburgh & Njoroge, 2011). Hence, there is a need to conduct a study on emotional intelligence among college students as they are the future leaders. Studies about personality traits towards emotional intelligence were conducted at foreign countries such as in Ohio (Jadhav & Gupta, 2014), New York (Nadja, 2012) and USA (Harms & Crede, 2010). Only few researches are conducted in Malaysia (Farhana Nabila & Ida Hartina, 2017; Rozman, 2007; Liau, Liau, Teoh & Liau, 2003). Therefore, motivates the current researchers to examine the relationship between self-esteem and mental health towards level of emotional intelligence among students in a Malaysian private higher learning institution (MHL).

## **Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

Self-esteem is a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem also means how people think about themselves, how much they like themselves and if they satisfy with their performance, especially how they feel about society, education and family and to what extent their ideal self and actual self are close to each other (Hosseini, Dejkam & Mirlashari, 2007).

Many studies had proven that self-esteem is a clear indicator to cultivate good emotional intelligence among students (Goleman, 1995; Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, Hollander & McKenley, 2002; Zeidner, Matthews & Roberts, 2004). Self-esteem refers to an overall evaluation of one's worth or value (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach & Rosenberg, 1995). It is often used as an indicator of psychological well-being (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer & King 2002). People with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to succeed than people with lower emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence is related with positive mood, high self-esteem (Schutte et al., 2002), less depression, greater optimism and mood repair (Schutte & Malouff, 1998).

Further studies also evidenced a correlation between self-esteem and emotional intelligence. Findings by Abbas and Junaid (2011) and Sameer (2008) suggested that self-esteem and emotional intelligence were positively correlated and significant. Farhana Nabila and Ida Hartina (2017) who conducted a study in a Malaysian public institution of higher learning also established a significant relationship between the two variables. As students and future leaders,

it is necessary to develop emotional intelligence through their self-esteem. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1: There is a significant relationship between self-esteem and level of emotional intelligence among students in MHL.*

According to Smith, Segal and Segal (2015), they suggested that people who are emotionally and mentally healthy have the capability in coping with difficult situations and can maintain and control a positive outlook which also remained focused, flexible and creative in bad times as well as good. World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can deal with normal stresses of life, can work effectively and efficiently and able to make a contribution to her or his community (WHO, 2013). Students' mental health is an important component on their personality to control their level of emotional intelligence. It shows how students or individuals solve their problems and make decisions in pressure situation and work in stress.

Good mental health will directly contribute to a good level of emotional intelligence (Gupta & Kumar, 2010), which means that they can solve their problems calmly with brilliant ideas and give accurate decisions based on what they think logically. Besides, students with good mental health will show good indicators that they are able to accept and perform any task given to them. In workplace situation, employees with good mental health will get more trust from the management.

Previous research by Kedarnath (2001) has explored on the nature of relationship of mental health and emotional intelligence. He found that there is a significant positive relationship between mental health and emotional intelligence, revealed that students with major mental health problem have a problem with their emotion. Students with different mental health problem will show different level of emotional intelligence. Previous study by Nizielski, Hallum, Lopes and Schutz (2012) on effect of mental health towards emotional intelligence among patients also claimed that there is a positive relationship between mental health and emotional intelligence. A study conducted by Gupta and Kumar (2010) discussed that mental health is a very important factor which are likely to affect emotional intelligence. Their studies proved that mental health were positively significant correlated to emotional intelligence. Besides that, Torabzadeh, Asadi, Ghazi, and Moradi (2013) in their study established a positive correlation between mental health and emotional intelligence among female athletes. Similarly, Nisa, Shafi and Rizvi (2013) evidenced a positive correlation between mental health and emotional intelligence among students in University of Kashmir. As students and future leaders, positive mental health is crucial to enhance their emotional intelligence. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posited:

*H2: There is a significant relationship between mental health and level of emotional intelligence among students in MHL.*

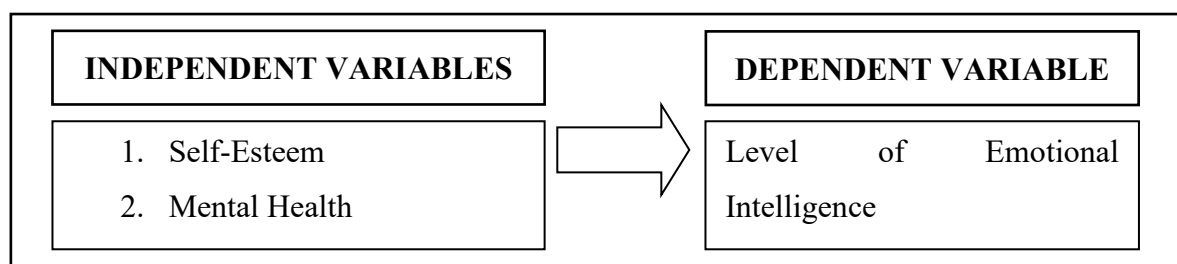


Figure 1: Schematic Diagram

### Method

This study employed a purposive sampling as the sample comprised of final year and penultimate year students in a Malaysian private higher learning institution, MHL, which shall remain anonymous. Early adulthood is a vulnerable time for many students in university life. During this time, most students experienced a lot of changes in term of growth and development of self-emotion and self-esteem. The rate of mental health problem reach at maximum point in early adulthood (Newman, Birrell, Speassa & Tait, 1996).

Based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) a total of 278 questionnaires were distributed to the students during their class. After excluding incomplete responses, only 247 questionnaires are usable for the data analysis, and this is considered ideal as it is between 30-500 (Sekaran, 2000). The questionnaire consists of three parts – demographic information, personality traits and emotional intelligence.

The demographics comprise of race, gender, year of study and current CGPA. Three instruments were employed in the study, using five points Likert scale. Self-esteem was adopted from Rosenberg (1965), mental health was adopted from Ferraro (2010) and emotional intelligence was adopted from Petrides & Furnham (2006).

### Findings

The current study aimed to discover a relationship between self-esteem and mental health towards emotional intelligence among students in MHL. For this purpose, data was analysed through Statistical Package of Social Sciences Version 22.

Table 1: Results of Reliability Test and Normality Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Kolmogorov-Smirnov (p-value)
Emotional Intelligence	0.867	0.000
Self-Esteem	0.758	0.009
Mental Health	0.904	0.200

Reliability test was performed to measure reliability of the questions. Cronbach's Alpha for emotional intelligence, self-esteem and communication skills ranging from 0.758 to 0.904, which indicate that the items are good and acceptable (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

The result from Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows that only one variable which is mental health have a p-value of more than 0.05 and the other variables (self-esteem and emotional intelligence) have p-values of less than 0.05. Since only one variable is normally distributed, non-parametric test is used to test all the hypotheses (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Demographic Profile

Criteria	Category	Number	Percentage
Race	Malay	186	75.3
	Chinese	8	3.2
	Indian	49	19.8
	Others	4	1.6
Gender	Male	79	32.0
	Female	168	68.0
Year of Study	Third year	162	65.6
	Fourth year	85	34.4
CGPA	<2.00	1	4.0
	2.00-2.49	13	5.3
	2.50-2.99	53	21.3
	3.00-3.49	103	41.7
	>=3.50	77	31.2

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents' demographic profile. Majority of the respondents are Malay (75.3%), female (68%) and third year students (65.6%). Most of them obtained a CGPA between 3.00-3.49.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	99.3887	149.889	12.24292
Self-Esteem	34.7692	28.568	5.34495
Mental Health	32.8583	18.333	4.28176

The results in Table 3 above show the students have a mean score of 99.837 for emotional intelligence, implies that they are able to perceive, express, use, manage and understand their emotions. The mean score for self-esteem is 34.7692 and 32.8583 for mental health, denotes that the students have acceptable level of self-esteem and mental health.

Table 4: Results from Correlation Analysis

Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	p-value
Self-Esteem	0.480**	0.000
Mental Health	0.562**	0.000

Based on Spearman's Rho Correlation Coefficient result in Table 4, it shows that the students' self-esteem and mental health are significantly positively correlated with emotional intelligence. Students with higher self-esteem and mental health have greater emotional intelligence.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the study have confirmed the hypotheses about the relationship between self-esteem and mental health with emotional intelligence. In terms of self-esteem, the result supports Schutte et al (2002) who established that people with greater emotional intelligence lead to a higher level of self-esteem, hence, perceived better self-worth or value. Therefore, individual with self-satisfaction and self-confident are able to manage their own emotion. The current findings also consistent with Sameer (2008) and Abbas and Junaid (2011) who documented a significant positive relationship between the two variables. Similarly, Farhana Nabila and Ida Hartina (2017) who found a positive relationship among public university students in Malaysia, argued that the understanding about this relationship is very crucial to help these students encounter the campus life and beyond.

As for the mental health, the positive relationship between mental health and emotional intelligence means that students with good mental health have capability to influence their own and other's emotion. Thus, better mental health of accounting students resulted in a higher emotional intelligence. The result supports Nisa et al (2013) who evidenced a positive correlation between mental health and emotional intelligence among students revealed that mental health is a main key point in managing emotional intelligence. Moreover, study by Nizielski et al (2012) also claimed that there is a significant positive relationship between mental health and emotional intelligence whereby students without good mental health are unable to control their emotions especially in dealing with unexpected situations. Gupta and Kumar (2010) argued that good mental health will directly contribute to a good level of emotional intelligence, in which people able to solve problems calmly with appropriate decision besides think logically. Additionally, students who are mentally healthy able to accept



and perform any given tasks or duties, whereas, in workplace situation, employees with good mental health will get more trust from management to manage projects.

The significant relationship found between self-esteem and mental health with emotional intelligence among tertiary level students specifies valuable information for future researches and interventions. Students with higher self-esteem and mental health possess greater emotional intelligence, reveals that personality traits influence individual's emotional intelligence. Universities, professional bodies or employers may take initiatives by providing trainings or short courses to instill students' self-esteem and mental health in order to develop their emotional intelligence as they are the potential leaders. Future researchers may provide a comparison between public and private institutions of higher learning and across genders, besides include other personality traits as additional variables.

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