

Emotional Intelligence and the Perceived Fairness and Suitability of Selection Procedures

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Abstract. The study examined the level of emotional intelligence among final year public university students and the relationship between emotional intelligence and the perceived selection procedures' (biodata, resume, work-sample test, written ability test, references, personality test and interview) fairness and suitability. A total of 548 respondents took part in this research. Samples were taken by simple random sampling technique focusing on final year students only. Emotional intelligence was measured by Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Quotient Inventory: Short (EQ-i:S) by Bar-On (2002) while the seven selection procedures fairness and suitability measurement were based on Steiner and Gilliland (1996). Descriptive and inferential analyses were employed through SPSS 14.0. Results indicated that the majority of respondents were moderate in terms of emotional intelligence level. Significant relationship was found between overall emotional intelligence and all seven selection procedures fairness and suitability.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Fairness, Suitability, Selection Procedures.

1. Introduction

Each year, thousands of students graduated from higher learning institutions in Malaysia. There are 20 public universities situated in Malaysia and graduates will enter the job market together with their counterparts from private higher learning institutions. Irrespective of whatever degree they possessed, all have equal chances of being selected by organizations for prospective positions. Competitions are stiff; making only the best will excel and secure jobs within six months after graduating. Based on this scenario, two imperative variables are identified. The first is soft skills (emotional intelligence) possessed by the graduates and the second, the selection procedures dictate by organizations as screening tools to select potential candidates. Linking these variables require the understanding of emotional intelligence as independent variables affecting the perceived fairness and suitability of selection procedures provide by organizations.

Emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well on our selves and in our relationship. Intellectual intelligence measured by IQ, on the other hand, changes little after teen years. Emotional intelligence is not fixed genetically and it does not develop only in our formative years. Rather, emotional intelligence is, for the most part, learned (Blank, 2008; Chapmen, 2011).

The starting point for this research stems from the facts that the literature on emotional intelligence and the perceived fairness and suitability of selection procedures, has yet to be found. Studies have focused on separate issues of emotional intelligence either in students, workers or general public but never link to fairness and suitability of selection procedures.

In light of this, recent research has made considerable advances concerning emotional intelligence in students. However, the perceptions of students towards personnel selection procedures and its relationship to emotional intelligence were never linked to determine its significance.

Students were found to be having different level of emotional intelligence (Ahmad Marzuki, Mustafa, Mat Saad, Abdullah, Muda & Che Din, 2006). Goleman (2001) have noted that emotional intelligence plays an important role in work achievement and everyday life. People who have high emotional intelligence were said to be able to adapt to different situations. Linking to personnel selection procedures, it is not known whether the acceptability of various selection procedures has any linked to emotional intelligence.

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People with high emotional intelligence may perceive and appraise their emotions accurately, overcome stress easily and adapt to different situations (Ahmad Marzuki, 2007). Emotional intelligence is an array of cognitive skills, capabilities and competencies that influence a person's ability to cope with environmental demand and pressures. Therefore, students with high emotional intelligence may intelligently perceived selection procedures as fair and suitable compare to those who have low emotional intelligence level. The domains of intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and general mood will determine the exact level of a person's emotional intelligence level. Thus, this would make them less vulnerable to intrinsic or extrinsic environmental influences. They would be more rational, have high resistance to stress and more adaptable to different situation.

In terms of fairness and suitability of selection procedures, it would be beneficial to understand the students' perceptions since this would have effects in its relationship between emotional intelligence and the selection procedures.

Social exchange theory and equity theory suggested that most people are concerned with the fairness of the material outcomes they receive from their formal or informal relationship with other people or organizations (Schuler, 1993). However, perceptions of procedural justice as the determinant of overall justice in a situation (the fairness of the methods used to make or implement final decisions) have a great influence on people's reactions to their evaluations of the people involved in making the decision. Thus, people are affected by the fairness or justice of a situation beside other characteristics of the people involved in the situation. The nature of the interactive relationship can be described as an interactive function of outcome favourability and procedural fairness. Procedural fairness moderates the impact of outcome favourability on individual's reactions to a decision. If the procedural fairness is relatively low, outcome favourability is markedly related to individual's reactions since as expected, people always respond to better outcomes. However, when procedural fairness is relatively high, outcome favourability has much less of an effect on individual's reactions. In addition, people are more likely to respond favourably to fair rather than unfair procedures when outcomes are relatively unfavourable.

Having these perceptions from public higher learning institutions students will assist organizations in preparing suitable selection procedures in order to enhance the effectiveness of selecting the best candidates for the organization. Therefore, the objectives of this paper are to identify the level of emotional intelligence across five domains (overall emotional intelligence, intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and general mood) among final year public university students and to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and the perceived selection procedures (biodata, resumes, work-sample tests, written ability tests, references, personality tests and interviews) fairness and suitability.

2. Methods

2.1. Population and samples

The population were final year students of six public universities in Malaysia (based on six zones). The zones were categorised as northern, central, southern, eastern, Sabah and Sarawak zone. A random selection was performed to determine university in each zone. A total of 110 questionnaires were distributed to each university. Only final year students were selected and this was done through simple random sampling technique. The technique requires enumerators to randomly select samples from a pool of final year students in each university. The total number of questionnaires distributed was 660. However, due to certain circumstances, only 548 questionnaires (83.03%) were utilised for this study (121 males and 427 females).

2.2. Instruments and Data Analysis

In this study, questionnaires were used as the main data source for analysis. Therefore, an instrument was formulated to integrate three parts. Part A consists of demographics information which includes gender, age, race, field of study, university and question on whether samples have attended a job interview before. Part B encompasses measurement on emotional intelligence through five domains (intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and general mood) adapted from Bar-On (2002) while Part C measures the fairness and suitability of seven selection procedures from Steiner and Gilliland (1996).

Descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 14.0 version.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Emotional Intelligence

Based on overall analysis, majority of participants were found to have a moderate level of emotional intelligence (84.1%, n=461) while the remaining participants were high in emotional intelligence (15.9%, n=87). None of the participants had low emotional intelligence level.

Looking at separate intrapersonal domain, it was found that the majority of participants were at the moderate level (79.4%, n=435) while 7.1 percent (n=39) participants were low in intrapersonal domain. Only 13.5 percent (n=74) of participants were found to be high in intrapersonal domain.

The number of participants who were high in interpersonal domain reached 46.4 percent (n=254) while 52.7 percent (n=289) were at moderate level and another 0.9 percent (n=5) were found to be low in interpersonal domain.

For stress management domain, the majority of participants were at the moderate level (79.7%, n=437). Only 15.2 percent (n=83) of participants had high stress management level while 5.1 percent (n=28) were low in stress management.

Similar to stress management domain, for adaptability, the majority of participants were at the moderate level (58.6%, n=321) compared to 40.3 percent (n=221) participants who had high adaptability. Only 1.1 percent (n=6) of participants were found to have low adaptability.

Most of the participants had a moderate level of general mood (73.9%, n=405). Only 25.5 percent (n=140) were high in general mood domain. Apart from that, 0.6 percent (n=3) were low in this domain.

Results indicated that majority of respondents were at the moderate level in terms of overall emotional intelligence. Only a small portion of respondents were classified as high in emotional intelligence while none was classified as low. This findings support the findings of Ahmad Marzuki et al. (2006) and Parker (2002). Looking at separate domains, it was also found that for intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and general mood, the pattern indicated majority were at the moderate level. Surprisingly, for the domain of interpersonal and adaptability, it was found that the number of students achieving high score in this two domains increased. The effort taken by public universities in enhancing soft skills among students as directed by the ministry of higher education have contributed towards these findings.

Generally, public universities students do not have problems with the general intelligence. Each year, thousands graduated from public universities with flying colours. The number of first class students increases each year indicating the ability of students to master their own field of study.

The number of students eligible for entering public universities keeps on increasing each year and, again, signifies an increase in general intelligence (IQ) of prospective students. Students were able to score high in various subjects and obtained better results. However, in reality, their emotional intelligence level may not have been increased up to the level needed to perform well in job interviews.

Currently, there are complaints from employers that public university students do not have the ability to communicate well and possess good soft skills. Weak interpersonal skills are among the problems face by students when graduating. To make matter worst, some are not able to converse well in English and Malay Language. How does this reflect the steps taken by public universities to enhance the ability of students?

Entering the job market requires graduates to possess high communication skills which embed emotional intelligence as part of the ability to combine social competency and high interpersonal skills. They would have to compete with colleagues graduating from private universities and those graduating from overseas. The question of whether they have been trained adequately during their terms in public universities is subject to a lot of discussion.

However, steps have been taken by universities to enhance soft skills among students. But are they adequate? Are they related to the specific needs needed by students to excel after graduating is yet to be answered. Perhaps, by looking at the interpersonal and adaptability domain which indicates better

percentages in terms of high level scores, we could applaud public universities for the effort taken. This might be a start in restructuring the overall system being delivered in public universities to produce excellent students in their relevant field as well as students with high soft skills and emotional intelligence level.

3.2. Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Selection Procedures Fairness and Suitability

The relationship between overall emotional intelligence and the seven selection procedures were found to be significantly positive. Although the coefficients are rather weak and low, it still depicts existence of the relationship between each and every selection procedure with emotional intelligence.

For overall emotional intelligence and biodata fairness and suitability, the value is $r = 0.22$ ($p < .05$) and $r = 0.20$ ($p < .05$) respectively. The results indicate that the higher the level of emotional intelligence in participants, the better they will perceive the biodata as fair and suitable to be used as selection procedure.

An r value of 0.24 ($p < .05$) was found for the relationship between emotional intelligence and resume fairness. For emotional intelligence and resume suitability, the result indicates $r = 0.253$ ($p < .05$). High emotional intelligence level of participants denote better perceptions on the resume's fairness and suitability to be used in organizations.

For work-sample test fairness, a significant relationship exists where the value of r was found to be 0.17 ($p < .05$) with emotional intelligence. Similarly, a significant relationship was also found between emotional intelligence and work-sample test suitability. The result was $r = 0.136$ ($p < .05$). This indicates that participants who have high emotional intelligence also have better fairness and suitability perception for work-sample test.

In terms of association between overall emotional intelligence and written ability test fairness and suitability, the results were $r = 0.12$ ($p < .05$) and $r = 0.12$ ($p < .05$) respectively. The fairness and suitability of written ability tests increases as the level of emotional intelligence increases.

References' fairness and suitability was found to be associated with overall emotional intelligence when results found that for fairness and emotional intelligence, it was $r = 0.16$ ($p < .05$) while for suitability and emotional intelligence, it was $r = 0.19$ ($p < .05$). The higher the level of participants' emotional intelligence, the more they will perceive references as fair and suitable.

Results on the association between emotional intelligence and personality test fairness and suitability found that $r = 0.15$ ($p < .05$) and $r = 0.11$ ($p < .05$) respectively. As with other selection procedures, the results depict that the higher the level of emotional intelligence, the higher they will perceive personality test as fair and suitable as selection procedure.

Finally, interview as the most common selection procedure used in organizations were found to be significantly related to emotional intelligence. Results found that $r = 0.26$ ($p < .05$) for emotional intelligence and interview fairness, and $r = 0.24$ ($p < .05$) for emotional intelligence and interview suitability. This indicates that perceptions of fairness and suitability increases when participants have higher level of emotional intelligence.

Results indicated significant positive relationship between overall emotional intelligence and all seven selection procedures fairness and suitability. The relationship suggests that the higher the level of emotional intelligence among students, the more they will perceive the procedures as fair and suitable for personnel selection. Although no studies has ever conclude the relationship between emotional intelligence and the fairness and suitability of selection procedures, this findings has come to a conclusion that students with better intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and general mood skills will posses better understanding of the need of certain selection procedures to be used in organizations. In a study by Ahmad Marzuki (2008) it was found that those with good personality perceived selection procedures as fairer and suitable. Emotional intelligence and personality domains could be related in certain aspects since elements of personality is embedded in emotional intelligence measurement.

All procedures are either a straight forward procedures such as biodata, interview, resume and references or test based procedures such as personality test, work-sample test and written ability test (Cook, 2004). For each procedure, earlier results have seen that students have perceived them as fair and suitable but with

different ranking (Ahmad Marzuki, 2011). The straight forward types were more favourable to them compared to the testing type procedures. However, all of them perceived the procedures as fair and suitable. The perceptions, therefore, relate to the level of emotional intelligence. Although the level of emotional intelligence is moderate, they do perceive the procedures as fair and suitable.

Students understand that they need to perform well in interviews. They also understand that they need to present themselves well for their biodata. Similarly, references and resume need to be impressive in order to convince organizations of their abilities, strengths and performances. They also understand that although they do not prefer testing based procedures, organizations may use testing procedures. They need to prepare themselves as best as they could. Only soft skills derived and trained during their studies will assist them in their endeavour.

Biodata is a straight forward document requiring students to prepare impressively all information regarding themselves. Therefore, those with good emotional intelligence skills will be able to formulate impressive biodata. The same goes with resume. References come from other parties. In order to be able to be perceived positively, they might want to present themselves favourably before references are made. Therefore, good interpersonal skills are needed. Interview is the compulsory procedure for organizations. Never before an organization making a hiring decision without interviewing the candidate. Therefore, students with high emotional intelligence skills will possess good interpersonal skills and this will help them in the interview. In taking test such as personality test, written ability test and work-sample test, students need necessary preparation. Personality test, for example, stems from social competencies embed in the self (Morgeson, Campion, Dipboye, Hollenbeck, Murphy & Schmitt, 2007). It relates to emotional intelligence. Therefore, those with high emotional intelligence as well as high general intelligence in the field will be able to succeed. The result of the test will definitely portray their true self.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this research have several theoretical and practical implications. In theory, the results indicate that emotional intelligence is important as soft skills needed by students to perform well in any selection procedures. They need to be able to have high intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and general mood skills in order to succeed later in the real world after graduation. This research has managed to conclude that each selection procedures are significantly related to emotional intelligence as a whole. This brings new depth in understanding what emotional intelligence behaviour will take them into and may as well predict a student's general intelligence.

Practically, although results indicate that the overall emotional intelligence relates to all selection procedures fairness and suitability, organization may consider using only non-intrusive procedures in order to get the best out of candidate's performance in selection. Although the study was done in students, it has nevertheless proved that the student's perception may be an initial step in understanding the fairness and suitability of the seven selection procedures. The fairness and suitability of each selection procedures are exclusive to the nature of the particular job itself. Therefore, it would be wise for organizations to make sure that procedures used are legal, fair and job related. The use of testing procedures may be utilised as long as it is being treated fairly and conducted by professional in the relevant testing procedures.

Public universities may take steps in strengthening the overall co-curricular activities to embed soft skills which may enhance the overall emotional intelligence level of students. Graduates are expected to secure jobs after six months and this might as well be the key performance indicator for public universities. Therefore, equipping students with better interpersonal skills, for example, will not only benefit the students but may upgrade the university standing in terms of student's employability.

Students need to be exposed to various selection procedures they may encounter after graduation. Much has been done in terms of equipping them with the necessary skills of going through job interviews, designing resume and so forth, but is this enough? Are the interviews mock session is being conducted by expert and professional in the field or are they merely people who did not have any formal training in selection interview. Only those who are well trained in interviews are eligible to conduct such a session. These are issues need to be tackled by public universities.

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