

Emotional Competence among Students from a Psychological Perspective

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Abstract: *Emotion is an important aspect for higher learning institutions' students to prepare for the real world after graduated. This paper addresses the issue of emotional competence as part of student's emotional intelligence construct. The definition of emotional intelligence versus emotional competence is elaborated. Skills of emotional competence require students to possess personal leadership, interpersonal development and healthy relationship, intrapersonal development and self-management. There are certain consequences of emotional competence such as management of emotions, subjective well-being and resilience. A student emotional competence development model is suggested that comprised of the key emotional competencies, assessment of emotional skills and consequences of emotional competence.*

Keywords: *emotional competence, emotional intelligence, student, psychological perspective, skills*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, accountability standards and low test scores have been the focus of education reform and criticism directed to public and private education at all levels. The broader mission of education becomes clouded when competency and effectiveness is defined solely or primarily on the basis of performance on standardized assessment models. It is a narrow emphasis of learning rather than the broader mission of higher education. Candidates or students for higher education are largely selected on their academic performance and their ability to do well in examinations. Academic performance normally reflects student's IQs, which inhibits age-related measure of intelligence level (Muchhal, 2014). IQ, in another word, constitutes general mental ability. The high intelligence (IQ) type of students are said to be adept in the realm of the mind but may be inept in the personal world. Higher learning institutions focusing on academic, career, and leadership development requires an emphasis on affective or emotional learning and competencies as much as academic learning. The presence of emotional intelligence could prove a useful indication for success in students (Marzuki et al., 2012; Bibi et al., 2016).

Demands of a global economy necessitate additional restructuring and reform efforts. This is due to the changes in the nature of work and productivity demands. Graduates are required to be competent not only in terms of academic standings (general intelligence) but also emotional skills. As universities and higher learning institutions prepare students for careers and productive employment, education will continue to modify its programs and instructions strategies. An increased interest and recognition of the importance of the contributions of the emotional mind is imperative since universities are preparing students for positions of responsibility and leadership.

Considering the importance of emotional aspects in preparing students for the real world after they graduated, this paper will address the issue of emotional competence as part of student's emotional intelligence construct.

II. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE VERSUS EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

The components of subjective experience, verbal description, accompanying physiological responses, motivational influences, behavioural expression, and consequences need to be considered when discussing the nature of emotions (Stanley & Burrows, 2001; Subramanyam, 2012). Depending on their orientation, some researchers view emotions as primarily biological and physiological while others view them as primarily psychological (Lazarus, 1991). In this paper, emotions are viewed as psychological phenomenon.

Research in psychology as well as interdisciplinary research clearly relates emotional intelligence and emotional skills to achievement, leadership, career success, personal health and well-being. In addition, a number of researchers have concluded that emotional intelligence is as predictive of success as normal IQ tests and other standardized measures of scholastic ability and achievement (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008; Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler & Mayer, 2000; Sternberg, 1985; Townsend & Gelhardt, 1997). This line of research carries a crystal clear message for universities who strive to develop their students to the fullest.

Salovey and Mayer (1997) discuss the intelligent use of emotions to guide behaviour and thinking, thereby enhancing effectiveness and outcomes in a given situation. Emotional intelligence encompasses the

human skills of empathy, motivation, self-awareness, self-control and adeptness in relationship. It involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express emotion, the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought, the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge, and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

Emotional intelligence determines one's capacity to develop the skills or competencies related to the elements listed above. These competencies can be divided into two main categories, personal and social. Personal categories include self-awareness (emotional awareness, the ability to self-assess with accuracy, high self-esteem), self-regulation (the ability to control emotion and impulse, flexibility in handling change, the ability to innovate), and motivation (the need to achieve, need to initiate and optimism). In the social categories, the competencies include empathy (understanding and developing others, a willingness to meet other's needs and the ability to 'tune in' to the individual's/group's emotional state), and social skills (persuasiveness, conflict management and leadership skills). According to Goleman (1995), people who acquire these skills may excel in human relationship, show marked leadership abilities and perform well.

As part of emotional intelligence construct, more weight is given to learning and development in emotional competence. This includes the opportunities and exposure to affordant environments for learning about emotion-related processes (Saarni, 1999). Therefore, emotional competence may best use to describe a transaction and not necessarily to describe a characteristic of a person (Saarni, 2000). The context that surrounds emotional competence is the interaction of the person and the situation which may involve other person as well.

The working definition of emotional competence is '*the demonstration of self-efficacy in emotion-eliciting social transaction*'. Self-efficacy here refers to individual belief that he or she has the capacity and skills to achieve a desired outcome. This is to describe how individual may respond emotionally, yet simultaneously and strategically apply their knowledge about emotions and their emotional expressiveness to relationship with others, such that they can negotiate their way through interpersonal exchange and regulate their emotional experiences toward desired outcomes or goals.

Given the emphasis on '*skills*' rather than '*abilities*', the concept of emotional competence is stressed towards skills that can be learned and developed rather than abilities (intelligence) that may be inherited. In university context, students are geared toward learning new skills every day to develop personal intellectual self-construct and this is the basis of emotional competence that need to be looked upon.

III. SKILLS OF EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Enhancing students' emotional competence is not an easy task. Its development is an intentional, active and engaging learning process directly or indirectly. These skills are normally learned and developed in social context. The social context, in this case refers to students' environment in higher learning institutions or universities. In general, emotional competency skills can be listed as follow:

- a) Skill in understanding other's emotions, based on situational and expressive cues that have some degree of cultural consensus as to their emotional meaning.
- b) Skill in using the vocabulary of emotion and expression terms commonly available on one's subculture and, at more mature levels, skill that link emotion with social roles.
- c) Capacity of empathic or sympathetic involvement on others' emotional experiences.
- d) Awareness of one's emotional state including the possibility that one is experiencing multiple emotions, and the awareness that one might not be fully consciously aware of his/her emotional state.
- e) Skill in understanding that one's emotional expressive behaviour may impact on another person and to take this into account in one's self presentation strategies.
- f) Capacity for emotional self-efficacy. The individual views himself or herself as feeling, overall, the way he or she wants to feel, accepting one's emotional experience and has emotional balance.

Acquiring the above skills for students can be developed through proper activities handled by higher learning institution or university authorities. Many students' activities can be geared towards achieving the needs for emotional competency skills through different kind of processes. One such process suggested here is called the '*emotional skills assessment process*' (Nelson & Low, 2003). This process evolves around four key competencies which can be translated into several specific emotional skills. These specific emotional skills can then be measured as assessment process to determine whether students have acquired the level needed to be emotionally competent in the key area. Table 1 specifies the four main key emotional competencies together with the specific emotional skills for assessment.

Table 1: Emotional skills assessment process

<i>Key Emotional Competencies</i>	<i>Assessment for Emotional Skills</i>
A) Personal Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Awareness - Empathy - Decision Making - Positive Influence
B) Interpersonal Development And Healthy Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anger Management - Anxiety Management
C) Intrapersonal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self Esteem - Stress Management
D) Self Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time Management - Positive Change - Drive Strength (self-emotional motivation)

Assessing the emotional skills in acquiring the four key emotional competencies can be done in various ways. It is up to the institutions or universities to formulate what kind of training, activities, and workshops suitable to their students. However, a general guide in doing this is to make sure that assessment of emotional skills for each key emotional competency follows the emotional learning system or the ‘5-self’ which is:

- 1 – *Self-Assessment*: To Explore (requires the student to develop an intentional self assessment habit of inquiring, discovering and questioning).
- 2 – *Self-Awareness*: To Identify (involves the process of identifying an experience as either a thought or feeling and leading to reflection).
- 3 – *Self-Knowledge*: To Understand (involves an understanding that allows the student to make choices about how to behave in a positive way).
- 4 – *Self-Development*: To Learn (involves learning various ways to improve behaviour).
- 5 – *Self-Improvement*: To Apply (requires the application and modeling of emotional competence behaviour to achieve academic excellence and career goals).

Success in acquiring emotional competency skills lies on how specific programs are embedded together so that it achieves the ‘5-self’ emotional learning system. Therefore, understanding students’ unique behaviour (as students come from different background, culture, community, and race) is imperative and must not be taken lightly.

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF EMOTIONAL COMPTENCE

As students acquire the above emotional skills in a variety of contexts while they are in university, they demonstrate in their behaviour the consequences of emotional competence. There are three such consequences namely management of emotions (coping strategies and management of emotional expressive behavior), subjective well-being and resilience (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Denham, 1999; Saarni, 1999).

4.1 Management of emotions

Coping strategies are critical to the management of emotion. Individual learn emotion scripts for socially desirable coping strategies at a relatively young age and with increasing maturity becomes more capable of providing contextualized justifications for strategic coping in everyday life (Saarni, 1997). Students may take into account dyadic status differences, degree of affiliation and intensity of felt emotion when considering stressful encounters and how they would manage their emotional expressive behaviour. Similarly, managing emotional expressive behaviour depends on students’ control of their inner feeling and how they have been trained to develop specific emotional competency skills. The nature of their everyday environment is also a factor which may influence their coping strategy towards emotion related situation, for example, dealing with stressful situation such as academic, personal, financial or interpersonal problems.

4.2 Subjective Well-Being

Psychologists have long examined the elements of subjective well-being. They have also examined the contributors of subjective well-being (Lazarus, 1991; Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). It has been concluded that one would be more likely to be happy if one is also young, educated and has a healthy social relationship with peers. Individual will be more likely to feel better if they have positive temperament, embrace optimism and minimize the negative feelings while enjoying mutually supportive relationship. Emotional competence,

which includes the capacity of self-efficacy, facilitates subjective well-being since it entails accepting one's emotional experience as justified and worthy.

Students who are capable of self-control are also those who appear to have learned some of the critical and basic skills of emotional competence, awareness of one's emotions, coping with negative circumstances and emotions and are able to emotionally balance their emotions (Gottman, Katz & Hooven, 1997).

4.3 Resilience

The ability to recover rapidly after experiencing unwanted experience is referred to as resilience. It would make sense if students behave with emotional competence across many stressful experiences, since this demonstrated resilience. However, one should bear in mind that resilience is not somehow a permanent ability. Research indicates that repeated unwanted experiences may wear out protective influences and erodes some competent emotional functioning (Luthar, Doernberger & Zigler, 1993). Students who were exposed to stressors that were within their coping capacity and were pushed to meet the emotional challenge will, nevertheless, demonstrate improved coping skills when face with future stressors as long as social support are present (from peers, groups, etc.). However, students who are exposed to stressors with little or inconsistent social support will show their emotional vulnerability. Therefore, resilience is a consequence of emotional competence, but it cannot be separated from the social relationship that students have as resources to draw on.

V. WHERE DOES EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE LEADS US?

In reviewing the above discussion, a student development overall model should be developed blending the positive contributions of affective and cognitive learning to stimulate emotional awareness in students. The elements below must be taken into account in student development programs to ensure the balance of cognitive and affective learning.

- a) Cross disciplinary, interconnected, integrated and holistic programs.
 - b) Cognitive and affective learning given great breath, depth and width throughout the curriculum.
 - c) Partnership between those responsible for 'in-class' and 'out of class' learning.
 - d) Team building and human relationship development are inherent aspects of the learning environment.
 - e) An emphasis on the understanding of meaning rather than an accumulation of knowledge facts.
- A general student development model incorporating emotional competence is suggested as follows:

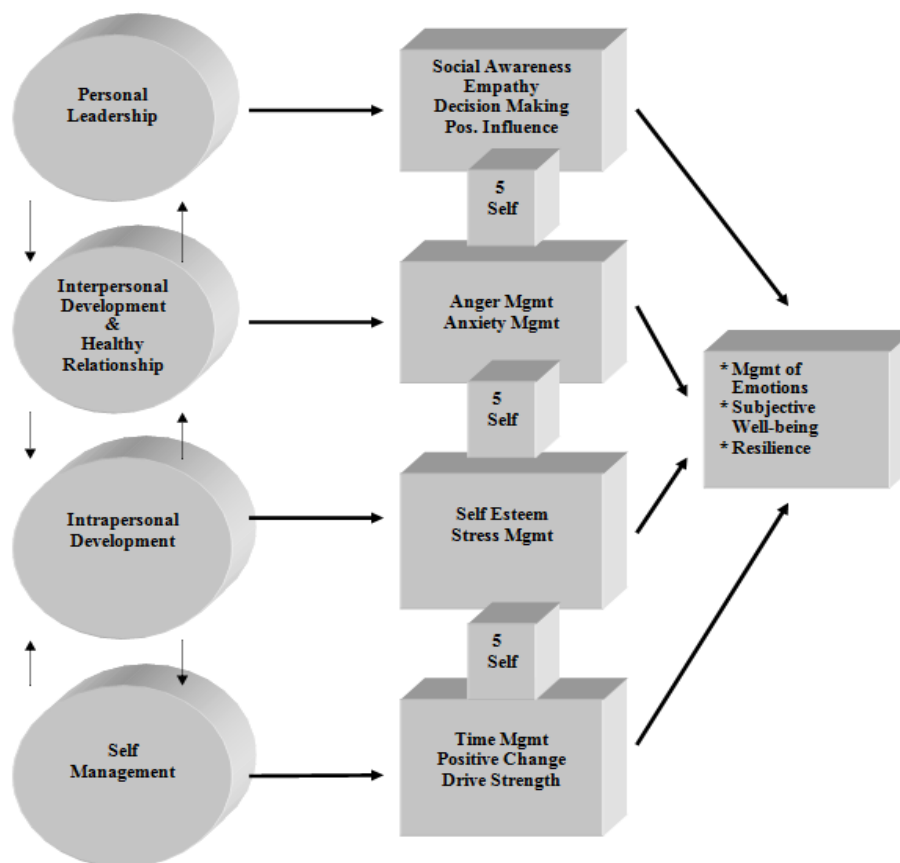


Figure 1: Student emotional competence development model

VI. CONCLUSION

The main goal of this paper is to provide an understanding of a coherent and practical approach of emotional competence among students from a psychological viewpoint. In order for them to stay physically and emotionally healthy, increase goal achievement and improve productivity, emotional competency skills must be mastered. Highly successful students must be able to demonstrate that they are actively involved in continuous learning and are goal-oriented achievers. There must be an acceptance and commitment to develop emotionally intelligent and competent individuals in all career fields.

Even though the primary attention of higher learning institutions or universities is academic performance, they should not neglect the development of emotional intelligence skills and other personal and social factors. Building healthy and productive students requires the active and intentional development of emotional competency skills as a normal and integral part of the process of education.

The discussion also evolved around the skills of emotional competence which includes key emotional competencies skills and assessment of emotional skills. Finally, consequences of emotional competence have been highlighted which include management of emotions, subjective well-being and resilience. In relation to this, a student development program model is suggested.

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