Personal, Family and Academic Factors towards Emotional Intelligence: A Case Study

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Abstract Emotional Intelligence (EI) is generally defined as the ability to control one's own and other's emotion under a particular situation. Using theory of EI, this study examines the influence of demographic background on Emotional Intelligence among accounting students in a private university. The demographic background focused in the study is categorised into personal factors (gender, ethnicity, region of origin and hometown location), family factors (family income, parents' employment and parents' level of education) and academic factors (year of degree, academic performance, type of secondary school and prior education level). The data is collected during lecture sessions through a self-administered questionnaire. The study found that family income, year of degree and prior education level show significant influence on the level of EI among the accounting students. However, further analysis prevails that only year of degree and family income able to explain the variation of EI.

Keywords Demographic Background, Personal Factors, Family Factors, Academic Factors, Emotional Intelligence

1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (is referred as EI) began to appear as early as in the 1920s, but only in 1990s, researchers started to explore the idea or theory of EI. EI is defined as the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions[1].

Decades of research found that EI is incredibly important when it comes to success. Having a superior IQ does not guarantee that one will be a superior doctor, accountant or leader[2]. Nowadays, organizations demand for employees with high leadership skills and it was proven that individuals with high level of EI can become good leaders[3].

Previous studies have indicated a significant relationship between demographic background and level of EI ([4],[5],[6],[7] and[8]). Therefore, using a theory of EI, this study generally aims to explore the impact of demographic background towards the level of EI among accounting students in a private university, PU, which shall remain anonymous to maintain confidentiality. Specifically, the demographic background focuses in the study is categorised into personal, family and academic factors.

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2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is known as a concept of social intelligence that includes the ability of a person to monitor one's own and other's emotions, to discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions[9]. According to[10], EI is a collection of success-oriented traits of a person whereas[11] described EI as vague for a concept. Reference[12] briefly described EI as how each individual would differ in their way to become a smart person. He further argued that EI is different from IQ; EI is about how well ones manage his or her relationship with others, how well ones can work in teams and his or her ability to lead.

Reference[9] stated that an emotionally intelligent person is skilled in four areas: identifying, using, understanding, and regulating emotions. Meanwhile,[12] stressed that EI consists of five components: knowing one's emotions (self-awareness), managing them, motivating self, recognizing emotions in others (empathy), and handling relationships.

2.2. Personal Factors and Emotional Intelligence

Personal factors such as gender, ethnicity and hometown

location may affect the level of EI of an individual. Reference[3] and[10] found that there is a significant difference in gender where females score high level of EI compared to men. Contrarily,[13],[14] and[15] found the differences in gender do not influence the level of EI.

Reference[3] also found that differences in ethnicity (Hispanics, White and Black) influence the level of EI. The result shows that the minority groups (Hispanic and Black) have higher level of EI compared to the majority group (White). However, a study by[16] on three different ethnicities (Hispanic, Euro-American and Asian) failed to find evidence that EI level differs according to ethnicity.

The location of a person lives, grows up and the environment of their living place can be a factor that affects the EI of an individual. This is evidenced by[13] whereby they found that locality influences the level of EI. Nevertheless,[10] found that region of origin and hometown location does not affect the EI of an individual.

Based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₁: There is a significant difference in level of EI between personal factors (genders, ethnicities, region of origin, hometown locations) among PU accounting students.

2.3. Family Factors and Emotional Intelligence

Family factors are also one of the demographic backgrounds that affect the EI of an individual. Parents are the persons who directly affect the EI of youths. This is confirmed by[17] who found a significant relationship between family environment and EI.

Economic hardship has its most significant impact on marriage through worsening of wives' and husbands' emotional problems which might cause marital instability [18]. Meanwhile,[10] found that higher household income reflects higher EI level, indicating that family hardships affect the level of EI. People from richer background may not be pressured as those from lower income family. In contrast,[19] found that children from low-income family have better emotional stability compared to children from middle-income group.

A good family environment can lead to a healthy life for the family members. Typically, a father has the responsibility to support the family, besides to monitor and educate his children, while a mother serves as a housewife. However, due to high cost of living nowadays, mothers also need to help in sustaining their family's economy. A working mother tends to have conflicts when she has to divide her time for works and family. Children's EI might be different if both parents are working or only one parent is working. Stress from work's environment can also influence the parents' emotion especially if he or she works in a high position. This is confirmed by[20] who found that there is a relationship between parent's belief and behaviour towards their children's achievement. Reference[21] examined the effects of respondents' job on their emotions and found that

job stress is higher for men and those with high levels of education.

A study shows a positive relationship between father's level of education and the EI level of their children[7]. This result is also supported by[10] who found that there is a significant relationship between the parent's levels of education and EI. Contrarily,[22] found no significant relationship between parent's level of education and EI among the adolescent.

Based on the above discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H₂: There is a significant relationship between family factors (family income, parents' employment, parents' level of education) and level of EI among PU accounting students.

2.4. Academic Factors and Emotional Intelligence

Academic factors consist of year of degree, academic performance, type of secondary school and prior education level. Reference[6] who conducted a study in three universities found that, only one university showed that the fourth year accounting students have higher EI than the first year. Meanwhile,[8] and[16] found that students' GPA influences their EI. Students with high GPA score significantly higher level of EI compared to students with lower GPA. Reference[8] also found that students from full boarding school have higher EI level compared to students from normal daily school. Whereas[5] evidenced that students staying at home have higher EI compared to those staying at hostel. Besides that, study by[4] on effect of prior education level also found that employees' level of EI is influenced by their prior education level.

Based on the above arguments, the following hypotheses are posited:

H₃: Year of degree, academic performance, type of secondary school and prior education level is the factors for EI among PU accounting students.

3. Methodology

This study employed the purposive sampling design as the sample of this study comprised of second, third, and final year accounting students in PU. The first year accounting students were excluded due to the unavailability of cumulative grade point average (CGPA) which is one of the variables required under academic factors.

Data was obtained through self-administered questionnaires which were randomly distributed to the 300 students during their class hour. The questionnaires are divided into two main sections – demographic section and trait EI. The demographic section contains information regarding personal, family and academic factors. After excluding incomplete responses, the final sample that can be used in the study is 215.

The trait EI consists of 30 items is adopted and adapted from[11]. The trait EI was evaluated based on a five-point

Likert Scale, to examine how strongly subjects agree or disagree with the provided statements[23].

4. Results

4.1. Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability test produces a result of 0.724 which indicates that the 30 items used to measure the level of EI are reliable. The measurement of five-point Likert scale is proven to have good internal consistency and stability. A data is considered reliable when the Cronbach's Alpha is more than 0.6. The closer the estimated Cronbach's Alpha coefficient approaches the value 1, the higher the internal reliability[23].

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

The detail descriptive statistical findings on personal, family and academic factors are displayed in the Table 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents are female, age of between 19-21 and Malay students. In terms of hometown location, majority of them come from urban area and central region.

As stated in Table 2, majority of the respondents come from family with income less than RM3000 per month and have only one parent who is working. Besides, most of the students' parents have SPM as the highest level of education.

The samples also cover 34.88% second-year accounting student, 28.37% third-year accounting students and 36.75% final-year accounting students. As for the academic result, most of the respondents have average CGPA of 2.51 to 2.99. Majority of them have prior education background in foundation program at PU itself. Only one-third of them stayed in hostel during their secondary school.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Personal Factors

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
Male	52	24.2
Female	163	75.8
Age:		
19-21	113	52.6
22-24	100	46.5
25 and above	2	0.9
Ethnicity:		
Malay	167	77.7
Chinese	15	7.0
Indian	25	11.6
Others	8	3.7
Region of origin:		
North Region	53	27.4
East Coast Region	46	21.4
Central Region	66	30.7
Southern Region	44	20.5
East Malaysia	6	2.8
Hometown location:		
Rural	76	35.3
Urban	139	64.7

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Family Factors

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Family income (monthly):		
< RM 3,000	92	42.8
RM 3,001 – RM 6,000	73	34.0
RM 6,001 – RM 10,000	32	14.9
RM 10,001 – RM 15,000	4	1.9
> RM 15,000	14	6.5
Parents' employment:		
Both parents are working	80	37.2
Only one parent is working	111	51.6
Both parents not working	24	11.2
Parent's level of education:		
Father		
- SPM & equivalent	95	44.2
- Diploma/STPM & equivalent	51	23.7
- Degree	36	16.7
- Postgraduate degree	18	8.4
- Professional	3	1.4
- Others (Eg: SRP/PMR,UPSR,etc.)	12	5.6
Mother		
- SPM	118	54.9
- Diploma/STPM	45	20.9
- Degree/Bachelor	32	14.9
- Postgraduate degree	4	1.9
- Professional	1	0.5
- Others (Eg: SRP/PMR,UPSR,etc.)	15	7.0

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics on Academic Factors

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Year of degree:		
Second year	75	34.88
Third year	61	28.37
Final year	69	36.75
Academic performance (CGPA):		
< 2.50	13	6.0
2.51– 2.99	81	37.7
3.00– 3.49	75	34.9
3.50– 4.00	46	21.4
Secondary school:		
Boarding	73	34.0
Non-boarding	142	66.0
Prior education level:		
Foundation in PU	148	68.8
Foundation/Matriculation in other institution	15	7.0
Diploma	39	18.1
STPM	9	4.2
Others	4	1.9

The Central Limit Theorem states that even though the distribution of data is not normal, it is reasonable to assume a normal distribution as the sample size is more than 100[24]. Therefore, in order to test the hypotheses, parametric tests are employed as the final sample is 215.

4.3. Personal Factors and Emotional Intelligence

The first objective of the study is to examine the impact of personal factors towards level of EI. Data on gender and hometown location are analysed using Independent Sample T-Test, while ethnicity and region of origin are tested using One-Way ANOVA to determine their impacts on the level of

EI. The result shows no significant difference in the level of EI based on genders, ethnicities, region of origin and hometown locations (p>0.05). Therefore H_1 is rejected, reveals that none of the personal factors affect the level of EI. The results provide evidence that difference in genders, ethnicities and hometown locations do not influence the level of EI among PU accounting students, probably due to the huge gap between the numbers of respondent in each of the personal factor.

The result on gender differences supported previous studies by[13],[14] and[15]. However, it is contradicted with the findings by[3] and[10] whereby they found a significant difference in gender when females score high level of EI compared to men. In terms of ethnicity differences, the result supported[16] which found no evidence that shows different level of EI from different ethnicities. However, this result is not in line with[3]. The results on region of origin and hometown locations are consistent with a study by[10] who claimed that these factors do not influence an individual's EI.

4.4. Family Factors and Emotional Intelligence

The second objective of the study is to examine the impact of family factors towards level of EI. Earlier, the data for father's and mother's level of education background were recoded and regroup to make them comparable. For mother, the group is divided into SPM (freq = 118) and diploma and above (freq = 94). While father educational background was regrouped to SPM (freq = 95), Diploma/STPM (freq = 51) and bachelor degree and above (freq = 69).

Through Pearson Correlation Coefficient test, out of the three variables namely family monthly income, parents employment and parent educational level, only family monthly income is positively correlated with EI (p<0.05), others were not. The finding is actually consistent with[18] but contradict to[10] and[19] which had found otherwise. The findings for parents educational background and parents employment is actually study done by[20] and supporting[22].

4.5. Academic Factors and Emotional Intelligence

The third objective of the study is to examine the impact of academic factors towards level of EI. In order to test the hypotheses, Pearson Correlation Coefficient is employed. Among the four academic factors, namely year of degree, academic performance, type of secondary school and prior educational level, it was found that academic performance and type of secondary school was not correlated (p>0.05). This result on academic performance is consistent with[11] but contrast from[8] and[25]. The other two were otherwise. Meanwhile, the result on type of secondary school contradict from[5] and[8].

To further explain the factors that influence the changes in EI, through multiple regressions, the study further investigate the degree of ability of all factors, namely monthly family income, year of degree and prior educational level, which are positively correlated with the changes of emotional intelligent. The result in Table 4 shows that prior educational level is fail to meet the selection criteria, as indicated by the nonsignificant t-value (p>.05). Year of degree able to explain 3% of the changes of EI, $F(1,213) = 6.49, p<0.05$. Whereas the combination of year of degree and monthly family income able to explain 5.1% of EI variation, $F(2,212) = 5.65, p<.05$. This findings conclude that the null hypothesis is rejected and it is statistically concluded that year of degree contribute 3% and its combination with monthly family income contributes 5.1% of the variation of EI. Since the percentage is too small, there are others factors that explain the EI variation and it is still open for future research.

5. Conclusions

This study aims to examine the impact of demographic background on Emotional Intelligence among accounting students in PU. The demographic background is categorised into personal factors (gender, ethnicity, region of origin and hometown location), family factors (family income, parents' employment and parents' level of education) and academic factors (year of degree, academic performance, type of secondary school and prior education level). Data of the study has been collected through a distribution of self-administered questionnaire to the 300 accounting students during their class hour.

The result found that there is a significant positive relationship between year of degree and level of EI where the final year students have higher level of EI compared to second and third year students. Another result found that there is a significant positive relationship between family income and level of EI among PU accounting students, indicating that students with higher family income have higher level of EI. Besides that, it is also found that there is a significant relationship between prior level of education and level of EI. Other factors; gender, ethnicity, hometown location, parents' employment, parents' education level and academic performance have been proven to have no significant influence on the level of EI. Therefore, it can be concluded that personal factors (gender, ethnicity, hometown location) do not give an impact towards level of EI among PU accounting students.

Further analysis prevails that only year of degree and family income able to explain the variation of EI. Year of degree contribute 3% and its combination with family income contributes 5.1% of this variation. Hence, other factors could be considered to determine their impact on EI of the students.

Since this study only undertakes the accounting students in a private university as its subjects, the result may not be generalized to all accounting students in Malaysia. Future research can use more comprehensive samples covering accounting students from other public and private universities in Malaysia.

Table 4. Analysis of Factors in Emotional Intelligence Variations

	Model	B	Std. Error	β	df	F	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	93.78	1.59		1.00	6.49	59.15	0.00
	Year of Degree	1.89	0.74	0.17	213.00		2.55	0.01
2	(Constant)	91.56	1.88		214.00		48.81	0.00
	Year of Degree	1.85	0.74	0.17	2.00	5.65	2.52	0.01
	Family Income	1.18	0.54	0.15	212.00		2.17	0.03
a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Intelligence								

Note: R^2 for Model 1= 0.030, and Model 2=0.051, p<.05

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