

Elements of Self-Awareness Reflecting Teachers' Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

Significantly, teachers of various educational settings play crucial roles in actualizing the purposes of education. In ensuring the effective attainment of the noble mission of learning and teaching, considerable emphasis must be given to teachers' well-being notably their emotional intelligence (EI). In recent years there is growing empirical evidence that EI contributes significantly to performance and productivity. However, literature on the role of EI in enhancing teachers' efficacy in Malaysia is scarce. This study attempts to fill this academic gap by examining the potential of self-awareness, one of Goleman's EI domains among teachers. Specifically, this study aims to determine the elements of self-awareness that could enhance teachers' efficacy from Malaysian perspective. Three focus group interviews were conducted with participants of both genders who comprise of young and old teachers, inexperience and experienced teachers from three different schools. This study finds intent as important sub-domain of self-awareness in Malaysian context thus extended the earlier model developed by Goleman. Significantly this study may be beneficial to spread awareness on the vitality of EI to improve psychological health and teaching success and, in turn, positive student outcomes. This study suggests integrated EI training that does not only increase teachers' efficacy but also may decrease burnout syndromes and job dissatisfaction.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, self-awareness, teaching efficacy, intent, teaching and learning

1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence is important for both work life and personal life (Gardner, 1983; Goleman, 1995, 1999; Wilks, 1998; Weisenger, 2000; Ferdowsian, 2003). In recent years there is growing empirical evidence that EI contributes significantly to performance and productivity. It can either enhance or inhibit performance and quality of work. Emotionally intelligent employees will produce work that meets the objectives of the organization, while workers who are less emotionally intelligent are unable to achieve the desired objectives. Goleman (1996) states that "emotional intelligence is a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them". Thus, individuals with high emotional intelligence are likely to have a high work rate and at the same time, show a commendable quality of work. Individuals who are aware about themselves are always warm toward other people and aspire to be a better worker.

Studies on emotional intelligence within learning environment are increasing in recent decades. There are empirical studies that attest the importance and relationship of emotional intelligence to teacher efficacy and well being, which in turn may lead to positive students' outcomes (Syed Najmuddin, Noriah, & Mohamad, 2011; Larsen & Samdal, 2012; Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012; Vesely, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Mass media have often reported on problematic teachers in negative view which portrays them as incapable of handling emotions. These news reports may degrade teachers' esteem and professional image. Teachers are implied as being irresponsible and incapable of being good role models to their pupils. This situation has been regarded as a serious matter. If teachers cannot control their own emotions, how can they control the young ones and train others in any unfortunate or difficult situations?

Teachers have multitude of tasks which are coupled with non-academic responsibilities during weekdays and weekends. These tasks may test the fortitude and patience of teachers, especially those who have more commitments or families. School holiday programs, holiday camps, motivational camps and other types of

activities outside the classroom seems to be never ending errands that teachers must do during weekends and school holidays. Therefore, significant work stress existed among teachers (Jowati, 2002; Chua & Fahrudin, 2002) as well as burnout, namely emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Faridah & Zubaidah, 1999).

A study by Mohd Najib (2000) on the stability of emotional intelligence among lecturers in local universities indicated that their emotional intelligence is at a moderate level, and do not stand out. According to him, lecturers need to have a high emotional awareness as they are coaches to would-be teachers. Their emotional stability will affect the effectiveness of the training they provide to prospective teachers. Mohd Najib (2000) asserts that frustration or burnout in workplace can cause emotional instability for would-be teachers. The consequence of this phenomenon and the long term effect would be suffered by the students at school. As we know, teachers and students constantly interact with each other physically and emotionally during the process of teaching and learning (Najib, 2000; Newton & Newton, 2001; Holloway, Patton, & Serna, 2001). In other words, quality teachers beget quality students. Hence, students are at risk due to close contact with teachers and frequent teacher-student interactions and socializations. Jowati (2002) postulates that teachers not only need to prepare themselves physically and emotionally in order to be good role models to students, but at the same time they also need to meet the expectations of parents and society. Stressful and tensed situations have become norms in educational challenges, and teachers have to face these situations daily.

Director General of Education, Datuk Seri Dr. Abdul Shukor Abdullah (New Straits Times, 2000, August 12) advises the chief school administrator to monitor teacher-student relationship to ensure students feel safe at school. This was done following a finding of the report that there are a small number of teachers who have mental illness. The implication is quite large in magnitude even though the number is quite small. The question is: who is responsible to monitor those teachers?

Many studies about emotional intelligence have been conducted in the US and Europe. However, in Malaysia, there are insufficient studies on emotional intelligence among teachers. The literature review conducted showed that the studies on emotional intelligence in Malaysia focused on the emotional intelligence of students (Noriah et al., 2001; Naghavi & Redzuan, 2011) and teachers (Langgulong, 1983; Najib, 2000; Noriah & Aliza, 2002; Noriah, Ramee, Siti Rahayah, & Syed Najmuddin 2003; Noriah, Syed Najmuddin, & Syafrimen, 2003, Syed Najmuddin Syed Hassan, 2005; Syed Najmuddin, Noriah, & Mohamad, 2011) while studies abroad (Skovholt & D'Rozario, 2000; Larsen & Samdal, 2012; Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012; Vesely, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013) show that the process of teaching and learning is influenced by the emotional stability of a teacher.

2. Study Objectives

This study attempts to examine the potential of self-awareness, one of Goleman's EI domains among teachers. Specifically, this study aims to determine the elements of self-awareness that could enhance teachers' efficacy from Malaysian perspective.

3. Method of Study

This qualitative study uses exploratory approach. In this approach, the researchers attempted to identify the important elements of self-consciousness among teachers at a college. This case study uses the multi-site multi-case exploratory case study. Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (1996), asserts that case studies involve in-depth assessment of individuals studied to describe the overall behavior and its relationship with individual backgrounds and environments studied. Researchers have identified a group of teachers as the unit of analysis. These teachers are from Maktab Rendah Sains MARA, a group of residential schools in Peninsular Malaysia.

A variety of data collection methods may be used for case studies. For this study, the method used was the focus group interviews (focus group interview) method. According to Morgan (1997), this method produces large amounts of data quickly and more focused on the topic being studied. This method helps researchers find and identify the factors of emotional intelligence in local context. Additionally, focus groups can be used as primary source of data, additional data sources or as a multimethod study that combines two or more methods of data collection without any rules affecting each other.

Data collected from focus group interviews was analysed using NUD*IST software. NUD*IST stands for Non-numerical Unstructured Data using Indexing, Structuring and Theorizing. Data were transcribed from recorder into Microsoft Word, and was categorized into themes and sub themes based on situational context. A tree diagram and Venn diagram were formulated based on the findings.

4. Findings

Figure 1 shows a Venn diagram that explains the elements of emotional intelligence mentioned by focus group participants from all schools. The Venn diagram shows all different and similar elements of emotional

intelligence that exist among the three focus groups. All focus groups agreed that emotional intelligence must contain an aspect of robust self-assessment.

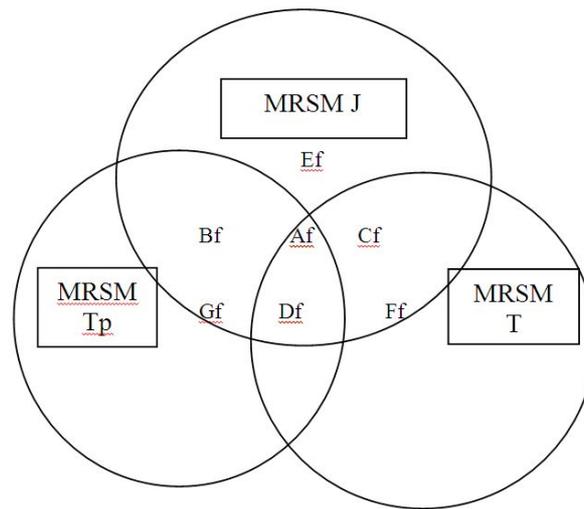


Figure 1. Venn Diagram Focus Group

Table 1 shows the code used to describe Figure 1. The meaning of the codes is as follows. (i) Af is the element that appeared in all three focus group interviews; (ii) Bf is the element that emerged in the focus groups done at MRSMJ and MRSMTp; (iii) Cf is the element that existed during focus groups done at MRSMJ and MRSMT; (iv) Df is the element that was shared by MRSMTp and MRSMT; (v) Ef is the element that emerged from participants MRSMJ only; (vi) Ff is the element that emerged from participants MRSMT only and (vii) Gf is the element that emerged from participants MRSMTp only.

In the table, different parts describe different subdomains of self awareness. The first part, Af, describes the element of self-assessment shared by the participants of the MRSMJ, MRSMT and MRSMTp focus groups. Bf projects the element of emotional awareness shared by the participants of the focus groups from MRSMJ and MRSMTp. Next, Cf describes the element of self-confidence shared by the participants of the focus groups from MRSMJ and MRSMT. Df projects the element of intent shared by the participants of the focus groups from MRSMT and MRSMTp. While Ef, Ff and Gf indicate that no element is owned separately by any of the focus groups.

Table 1. Subdomains of Self Awareness

Part	Subdomain
Af	Self Assessment
Bf	Emotional Awareness
Cf	Self-Confidence
Df	Intent
Ef	None
Ff	None
Gf	None

The tree diagram in Figure 2 shows self awareness domain of emotional intelligence and its subdomains. Each subdomain has their frequency recorded. Tree diagram was constructed to display subdomain frequency of emotional intelligence. The finding shows the prominence or lack of prominence of subdomains by the frequency of its existence in the focus group interviews. In each factor there is at least one element that appears

more frequently compared with other elements. In the factor of self-awareness, the prominent subdomain is intent ($f = 9$).

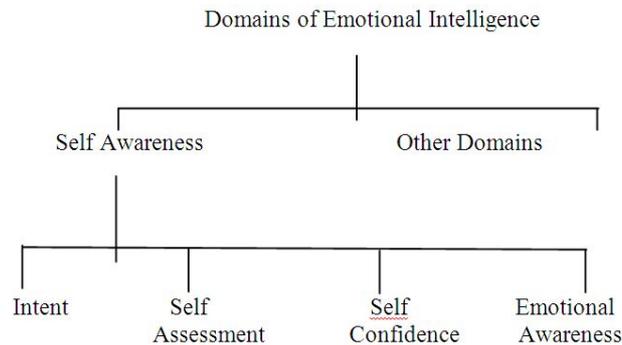


Figure 2. Self Awareness Domain and Subdomains

5. Discussion

5.1 Self Awareness

The first domain derived from the analysis of qualitative data is self awareness. This domain is defined as awareness of emotions, preferences, resources and intuitions within self according to the framework of the concept of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1999). This domain can be divided into four elements, namely emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence and intent. Data analyses indicate a new subdomain called intent as an additional element of self-awareness domain.

5.1.1 Emotional Awareness

This element is defined as the ability to identify own emotions and their effects. Conversations from the focus groups also showed that emotional awareness is important in maintaining good relationships with colleagues and others. According to one female participant in focus group MRSM Jasin:

"We want to keep our relationship. While we are angry at him/her (the student), but it does not mean we hate her, as a teacher I also felt (grieving) on my students ... (but) not for long ... "(FGMRSMJ: 1449-1453)

One of the focus group participants of MRSMTp stated that emotion (angry) depends on the situation. Emotions were usually shown based on specific reasons. Thus, he argued that negative emotional outbursts are not considered wrong if the outburst takes place in accordance to the situation as stated in the quote below:

"Feel mad at student who did not learn, we're angry because we love him to pieces ... We are angry at a driver who overtake haphazardly ... so we're mad at him ... what if you died or others who died because of him "(FGMRSMTp: 1102-1107)

Even so, one focus group participant stated that emotional outbursts should not be done excessively as it can cause long-term effects on an individual or others.

5.1.2 Self-Assessment

This element is defined as knowing the strengths and weaknesses of oneself. Individuals who carry out self-assessment would realize the consequences of the actions they have done. They can assess the appropriateness of their shown behavior by relating to the surrounding circumstances. Thus they will behave according to the norms of the local community. Ability to evaluate and identify different types of emotion and intensity of emotions can help people stabilize their emotions. One focus group participant (MRSMTp) mentioned that personal problems need to be identified before the start of lessons in classroom. Problems outside classroom that have nothing to do with academic matters can affect the process of teaching and learning. He said:

"Sometimes when we go to class ..., sometimes there are other problems that we face beforehand, sometimes we feel a little emotional. We cannot... (let) our emotions affect our ability to teach in the classroom." (FGMRSMTp: 1516-1519)

One of the male participants in focus groups MRSMT also stated that self-awareness can help a person sees himself introspectively. This will increase the sense of responsibility. According to him:

"We realize who we are ... acceptance. Then, comes a sense of responsibility ... "(FGMRSMT: 381-382)

5.1.3 Self-Confidence

This element is defined as believing in one's abilities. A focus group member (MRSMJ) also stated that every individual should try to look into oneself and then accept all the abilities and disabilities (strength and weaknesses). Acceptance would increase self-confidence. According to him:

"Acceptance of oneself (is important). Self-confidence (will grow) ... "(FGMRSMJ: 1561)

One MRSMT male focus group participants also stated that the teachers are role models to the students. To be a good role model, a teacher must know that his strengths and self-confidence are intrinsically shaped. Such confidence will lead to positive behavior that can be emulated by the students. Excerpt below gives an overview of these:

"... relate to the students. First, we are as role model, our inner self. Our external appearance, if I want to play rugby, for sure ... we see the physical role model ... this play(s) an important role (for students to emulate) ... "(FGMRSMT: 377-380)

5.1.4 Intent

This element is defined as an objective or goal in doing something. Participants from two focus groups agreed on the need to know the intent when doing something. According to them, the intent (goals or objectives) should exist for the purpose of determining what, how and why we do something. For example, one focus group participant MRSMT Taiping stated:

"I think we have to know the goals (our intentions) ..." (MRSMTp: 1500)

Participants also associated intent with sincerity. According to them, when the intent is sincere and the sincerity is manifested in each behavior, each work will be implemented perfectly even when one is emotionally unstable. Thus, the performance of the work will be more consistent and not affected by emotional undercurrents. Furthermore, the performance can be sustained by having a real intent. One participant mentioned:

"... work sincerely. Emotion arises from internal, sincerity is the key, do it sincerely even though you are angry, love to do , satisfied or not, get a reward or not. That's the principle. "(FGMRSMT: 294-297)

Sincerity of intent based on religious values is essential in everyday life. According to one focus group participant (MRSMT), a combination of intent, sincerity and religious values will help an individual in controlling negative feelings. Individuals who can manage the feeling and align with job requirements will be able to improve performance. This is confirmed by the participants in the excerpt below:

"... In the context of Islam, we must relate to an internal mechanism like sincerity ... if the emotions that emerge is handled with sincerity, so individual will be a better person ... emotions are unavoidable. So if handled with sincerity and guided by revelation, (everything will turn out well). "(FGMRSMT: 274-278)

Another male participant in the focus group highlighted the intention or purpose in life will improve a person's self-awareness, he said:

"I think I want to add another one in terms of our goal in life ... into a job that can raise our self-consciousness, so we can achieve our goal (intention)."(FGMRSMT: 423-425)

6. Conclusion

This study has brought into light the important role of self-awareness specifically the newly-founded sub-domain i.e. intent, in enhancing teachers' emotional intelligence in relation to teaching efficacy and satisfaction. Teachers need to understand the role of emotions in teaching and learning and how to use and regulate it productively in the process of teaching and learning. Teachers who demonstrate interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence in teaching and learning are able to handle conflicts and solve problems in class regardless of the students' diverse ethnic, socio-economic status or different skill levels. This will definitely contribute to positive and productive student-teacher relationship in turn, positive educational outcomes.

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