



Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Skills Competency and Personal Development Among Secondary School Counselling Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the extent to which emotional intelligence contributes to the professional functioning of counselling teachers in secondary schools in Kulaijaya District, Johor. Although emotional intelligence is widely recognised as an essential factor in educational leadership and counselling effectiveness, empirical evidence focusing on Malaysian counselling teachers remains limited. This research examines the level of emotional intelligence of teachers, evaluates their skills competency and personal development, and analyses the relationships between these constructs. A quantitative case-study approach was used, involving 52 counselling teachers selected from secondary schools in the district. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring five domains of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, empathy and social skills—together with professional skills and personal development. Descriptive analysis indicated that emotional intelligence was at a moderate level overall, while both professional skills competency and personal development were at high levels. Correlational analysis demonstrated medium to strong positive associations between emotional intelligence and both professional skills and personal development, with the strongest effects attributed to empathy, social skills and overall emotional intelligence. These findings highlight the significance of emotional intelligence as a psychological resource that enhances counselling teachers' effectiveness. Strengthening emotional intelligence competencies may therefore contribute to improved counselling services and the professional growth of teachers in Malaysia.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; counselling teachers; skills competency; personal development; Malaysian education

1. INTRODUCTION

The work of counselling teachers has become increasingly complex as schools face rising academic, emotional and behavioral challenges among students. Their ability to guide, support and respond effectively depends not only on technical training but also on the personal qualities that shape their interactions. Emotional intelligence, which encompasses self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, empathy and social skills, has been widely recognized as essential for effective counselling and educational leadership. Seminal works by Goleman (1995), Bar-On (1997) and Mayer and Salovey (1997) established emotional intelligence as a multidimensional construct that influences interpersonal functioning, adaptability and the quality of human relationships. Research further demonstrates that emotional intelligence contributes to self-esteem, professional confidence and multicultural competence within counselling environments (Constantine & Yeh 2001; Williams 2001; McManus 2001; Easton 2004).

Within the Malaysian context, emotional intelligence has been identified as a key factor influencing the quality and effectiveness of school counselling services. Mohd. Najib et al. (2002) emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence among teachers in carrying out effective consultation with students. Similarly, Mohammad Hashim and Sharifah Amnah (2005) noted that weaknesses in emotional intelligence, counselling skills and personal qualities can diminish the perceived credibility of school

counsellors. Sabariah (2004) also highlighted that effective counselling requires a blend of personal growth, emotional awareness and professionally developed skills, suggesting a strong link between emotional intelligence and counselling performance. Despite growing recognition of emotional intelligence in educational settings, limited empirical evidence connects emotional intelligence with the professional functioning of counselling teachers in Malaysia, particularly with regard to skills competency and personal development. In many schools, counselling services are expected to address increasingly diverse student needs, yet the emotional readiness of counselling teachers has not been sufficiently examined. This study therefore investigates the level of emotional intelligence among secondary school counselling teachers in Kulajaya District, explores demographic differences and evaluates whether emotional intelligence is associated with two critical indicators of counselling quality: skills competency and personal development.

The study builds upon local and international findings by examining emotional intelligence as a potential explanatory variable for counselling teachers' effectiveness. By understanding how emotional intelligence relates to professional functioning, stakeholders may improve training programmes, reinforce emotional competencies and enhance the overall quality of school counselling services.

2. METHOD

A quantitative descriptive case-study design was employed to examine emotional intelligence and its association with professional functioning. The sample consisted of 52 counselling teachers from secondary schools in Kulajaya District, Johor. A structured questionnaire measured emotional intelligence across the five domains commonly found in the literature—self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, empathy and social skills—drawing conceptually from models proposed by Bar-On (1997), Goleman (1995) and Mayer and Salovey (1997). Skills competency and personal development were also measured to represent professional functioning. Data analysis included descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients, with significance evaluated at the $p < .05$ and $p < .01$ levels. This approach followed similar analytical strategies used in previous emotional intelligence research in educational settings

3. RESULTS

The counselling teachers demonstrated a moderate level of overall emotional intelligence. Social skills scored highest among the five domains, while self-awareness scored lowest, indicating variability in emotional capacities. Skills competency and personal development, however, were both found to be at high levels, suggesting that teachers possess strong professional abilities even when emotional intelligence is not uniformly high. No significant differences in emotional intelligence were observed across gender or school location, but significant differences were identified based on designation grade and years of service, highlighting the potential influence of professional experience.

The correlation results indicated that emotional intelligence is positively associated with both skills competency and personal development. Empathy and social skills showed the strongest correlations with the two outcome measures, consistent with the view that emotional attunement and interpersonal capability are central to counselling effectiveness. Self-motivation showed moderate correlations, while self-awareness and self-control were weaker yet still positive. The overall emotional intelligence score produced the strongest correlations, demonstrating that emotional intelligence acts as an integrated psychological resource in counselling work.

Table 1. Pearson Correlations Between Emotional Intelligence and Professional Outcomes

Emotional Intelligence Variable	Skills Competency (r)	Personal Development (r)
Self-Awareness	0.124	0.207
Self-Control	0.118	0.149
Self-Motivation	0.412**	0.297*
Empathy	0.581**	0.670**
Social Skills	0.608**	0.608**
Overall Emotional Intelligence	0.645	0.666

* Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

4. DISCUSSION

These results reinforce the established view in emotional intelligence research that competencies such as empathy and social skills are central to interpersonal effectiveness in counselling (Bar-On 1997; Goleman 1995; Mayer & Salovey 1997). Counselling teachers with higher emotional intelligence particularly those who are more empathetic and socially skilled are

better able to understand students' emotional states, communicate effectively and foster supportive environments. The strong positive correlation between overall emotional intelligence and both professional outcomes suggests that emotional intelligence contributes meaningfully to teachers' professional functionality.

The lower scores observed in self-awareness and self-control point toward potential areas for professional development. Studies by McManus (2001), Williams (2001) and Easton (2004) similarly highlight the need for self-reflective and regulatory emotional skills in counselling contexts. Strengthening these areas may help counselling teachers manage emotional challenges more effectively, thereby enhancing the quality of service delivered to students. The significant differences by years of service and designation grade further suggest that emotional intelligence may develop with professional maturity, supporting Abd. Rahman's (2000) view that improvement in counselling services requires sustained professional growth.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that emotional intelligence is not merely a desirable personal trait but a meaningful contributor to skills competency and personal development among counselling teachers. As emotional intelligence is learnable and improvable, targeted training programmes may provide substantial benefits.

5. CONCLUSION

This study contributes evidence that emotional intelligence plays a significant and positive role in counselling teachers' skills competency and personal development. Although overall emotional intelligence was at a moderate level, teachers demonstrated strong professional abilities, especially in interpersonal domains. The strongest predictors of professional functioning were empathy and social skills, underscoring the importance of interpersonal sensitivity in counselling work. Strengthening emotional intelligence—particularly in self-awareness, self-control and motivation—may enhance counselling effectiveness, promote professional growth and improve guidance services in Malaysian schools. Emotional intelligence should therefore be integrated intentionally into teacher training and professional development initiatives to support high-quality counselling practices.

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