

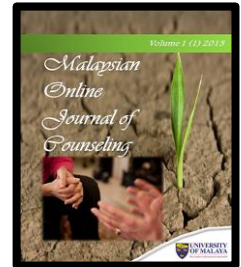
## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND COUNSELOR TRAINEES' SELF DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at identifying the relationship between emotional intelligence and counselor trainees' self-development. The sample consists of 128 final year students of counseling programs from five universities in Malaysia selected by random stratified sampling. This study uses a correlational study design. The instruments used are namely: Test Your EQ inventory by Davis (2004) and Supervisee Levels Questionnaire-Revised (SLQ-R) inventory by McNeill, Stoltenberg, and Romans (1992). Data were analyzed using the Pearson correlation test. The results showed that there was significant relationship between emotional intelligence and counselor trainee's self-development,  $r = .301$ ,  $p < .05$ . Overall, these findings provide a strong implication for the counseling program at each institution of higher learning in Malaysia, in producing counselor trainees with emotional intelligence who know the needs in facing clients and giving client feedback.

*Keywords:* emotional intelligence, self-development, counselor trainees,



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## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, emotional intelligence has been one of the major interesting research subjects due to the development of the counseling profession. This was confirmed by findings of research carried out by Miville, Carlozzi, Gushue, Schara and Ueda (2006) that emotional intelligence greatly helps the counselor in reflecting the client's feelings accurately, as well as establishing good rapport through effective communication even with clients of different cultural background. Past study by Kaelber and Schwartz (2014) found that no difference existed in emotional intelligence between counselor trainees from eastern and western countries. Hill (2013) also highlighted that the counselors and trainees experience frequent emotional challenges to their own self development; this interfered with their professionalism in delivering counseling services and affected client outcomes.

Self-development is a process that can be planned and structured. The theory of development pioneered by Buhler, Erikson, Neugarten, and Jung also stressed that development is a continuous process and everyone will face new challenges at every stage of development in life (Ryff & Singer, 2006). According to Irving and Williams (1999), self-development is a process of shaping the skills, attitudes and specific qualities that can be monitored from the beginning up to the level of personal success. The skills include expertise in emotional intelligence which every counselor trainee needs to possess. Counselors, especially counselor trainees should have a healthy self-development to help clients develop (Donati & Watts, 2005). This is consistent with one of the aspects in the counselor training curriculum recommended by the Board of Counselors (2003) that growth and human development are important aspects of every counselor and should be applied in the teaching and learning of counseling trainees in Malaysian public universities. It is also consistent with guidelines for one of eight broad areas of counselor training issued by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (2009) which cover human growth and development.

Thus, this current study specifically will examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and counselor trainees' self development in Malaysia. Generally, the findings of this study hopefully can develop a more rigorous understanding of the counseling program at each institution of higher learning in Malaysia in producing potential counselors who not only have complete requirements in facing and giving feedback to their clients during counseling sessions conducted later, but also making counselors more motivated, self-aware and aware of others and having autonomy reliance.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and counselor trainees' self-development in Malaysia

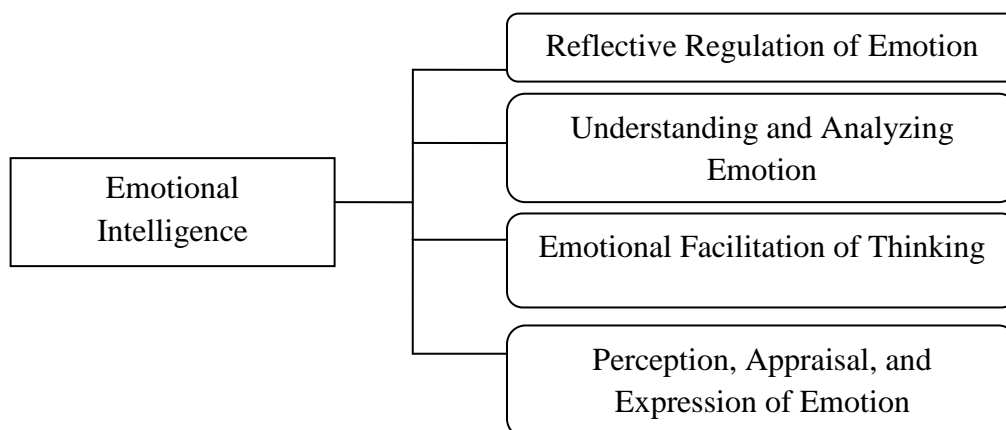
## THEORY APPROACH

The study is based on two models of the earlier researchers. The models underlying this research are the Emotional Intelligence Model by Mayer and Salovey (1997) and the Counselors Personal Development Model by Stoltenberg (1998). Both of the models are seen as suited to the research objectives and are very powerful in guiding this study.

### *Emotional Intelligence Model*

This study is based on the Four Branch Emotional Intelligence Model by Mayer and Salovey (1997) in looking at emotional intelligence among counselor trainees. This model is focused on complex intelligence related to emotions in the person's daily life. Four components of emotional intelligence are reflective regulation of emotions, understanding and analyzing emotions, emotional facilitation of thinking, and lastly perception, appraisal and expression of emotions.

The first component of the Four Branch Emotional Intelligence Model is reflective regulation of emotions which focused more on how to control emotion in increasing the emotional and intellectual development of counselor trainees. In this component, counselor trainees will be made aware of the thinking type and process which will stimulate their feeling to make a good decision. Meanwhile, the second component is understanding and analyzing emotions whereby counselors will label their emotion and recognize the relationship between something happening with their own emotions. Here, the counselor trainees will understand the complex emotion and the changes of emotion in themselves or in their clients. The third component of the Four Branch Emotional Intelligence Model is emotional facilitation of thinking where counselors use emotion as part of the reasoning process in certain situations. The emotion will change the perspective of counselor trainees depending on what happens at that time. The last component is perception, appraisal and expression of emotions. It happens when counselors tend to recognize emotion in certain level which include physical, affect and thought. The counselor trainees will recognize the client's emotion from words, behavior or appearance. The following Figure 1 explains the Four Branch Model Emotional Intelligence by Mayer and Salovey (1997):



*Figure 1: Four Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)*

## *Counselors Personal Development Model*

The study is also based on the Integration Developmental Model (IDM) introduced by Stoltenberg (1998). The IDM is built on counselor's development models and psychotherapy and it describes the integration of development (Stoltenberg, 1998). The first level is the beginning entry level of the trainee, the second level is trial and tribulation and the third level is the challenge and growth level and then up to four levels of integration.

At the first level, counselor trainees will have high motivation to be counselors, worry when doing certain things, are aware and also focused when using counseling skills. They are dependent on their lecturer or supervisor and need the structure from both of them to move on. They also have minimal confrontation with the client. In this stage, counselor trainees have very limited self-awareness and they are still unaware of their strengths and weaknesses. At the second level, counselor trainees have unstable motivation; sometimes it increases and sometimes it decreases. They tend to confuse and refuse at this tough level. They are also dependent on, and sometimes independent of, their lecturer or supervisor; at this level they start to focus on their client or, in other words, they empathize with their client and understand the client's world but at the same time they tend to be confused or trapped by certain problems. Self balance issues are the main point at this level. At the third level, counselor trainees' motivation is stable and they focus on their profession holistically. In this stage, their self-autonomy beliefs are strong and they also know how to get consultation from their lecturers or supervisors. They are also aware and recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, empathize and show more understanding toward the client; they not only focus on the client and counseling process but toward their self and use self-therapeutic steps in conducting sessions. This third level then goes up to four levels of integration.

IDM also describes the progress of trainees through the level of development based on three basic structures: motivation, self-awareness and others, and autonomy. This progress is assumed to move in an orderly manner through the eight functional domains related to activities of counseling and psychotherapy which are skills assessment intervention, assessment techniques, interpersonal assessment, client conceptualization, individual differences, theoretical orientation, treatment planning and goals and professional ethics. Figure 2 explains the structure, domains and development level of the Integration Developmental Model by Stoltenberg (1998):

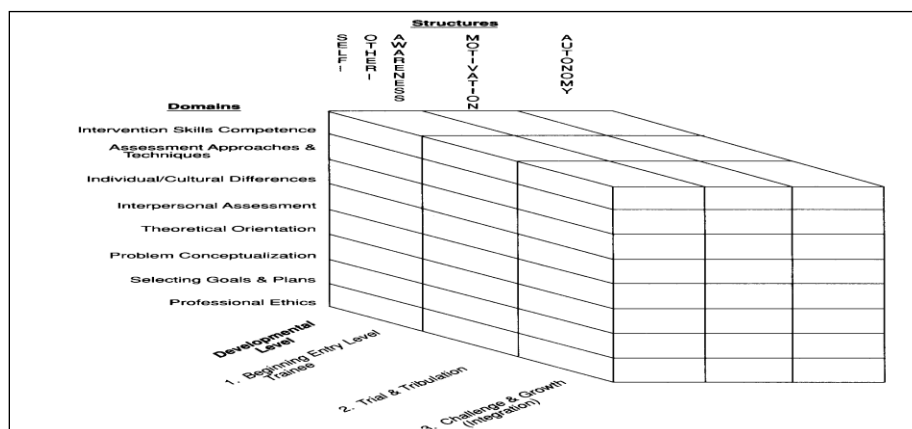


Figure 2. Integration Developmental Model (Stoltenberg, 1998)

Table 1  
*The Sample of Final Year Students*

| Universities                                | Location        | Number of Subsample |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|
| Universiti Malaya (UM)                      | Kuala Lumpur    | 14                  |
| Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)             | Selangor        | 11                  |
| Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)      | Negeri Sembilan | 20                  |
| Sultan Idris University of Education (UPSI) | Perak           | 57                  |
| Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)        | Terengganu      | 26                  |
| <b>Total of sample</b>                      |                 | <b>128</b>          |

## RESEARCH TOOLS

### Part A: Demographic

This section consists of the sample's demographic survey with questions on gender, semester, frequency of counseling sessions with clients or friends, the frequency of meeting with lecturers to discuss training sessions conducted, the most common problems encountered during the sessions and how to address the problem.

### Part B: Test Your EQ inventory

This section consists of the Test Your EQ inventory (Davis, 2004). For this study, we used the inventory as translated into Malay language by Norshafarina (2008). This questionnaire contains 40 items designed to measure the level of emotional intelligence based on four main subscales which are identifying emotions, understanding emotions, controlling emotions and using emotions.

### Part C: Supervisee Levels Questionnaire-Revised (SLQ-R)

The Supervisee Levels Questionnaire-Revised (SLQ-R) was developed by McNeil, Stoltenberg, and Romans (1992). The questionnaire contains 30 items and includes three subscales which are motivation, having self-awareness and awareness of others and autonomy reliance. It was designed to examine counselor trainees' self-development based on the level suggested by Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987). In this study, we used the Malay language version translated by Wan Marzuki (2007).

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used to test the hypothesis of this study. Table 2 shows the hypothetical studies and statistics used for this study.

Table 2  
The Hypothesis and Statistics Used for this Study

| Hypothesis   | Independent variable   | Dependent variable                   | Statistic           |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and counselor trainees' self-development | Emotional intelligence | counselor trainees' self-development | Pearson correlation |

## THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

From Table 3, the significant finding emerge from this study is that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence with counselor trainees' self-development that is,  $r(128) = .301, p < .05$ . According to Salkind (2009), this relationship is in the weak category but it does not cause problems because the sample is large and represents the population being studied. In conclusion, this study rejects  $H_0$  1 as findings of the study and the study found significant relationship between emotional intelligence and counselor trainees' self-development.

Table 3  
*Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence Self-Development Level of Counselor Trainees*

| Variable               | Emotional intelligence | Counselor trainees' self-development |
|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Emotional intelligence | 1                      | .301                                 |

*Note.* Correlation significant at .05 level

## DISCUSSION

This study found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence with counselor trainees' self-development; this suggests that higher emotional intelligence means higher counselor trainees' self-development. These findings are consistent with the view of Upadhyaya (2008) based on several studies on emotional intelligence and self-development. These studies found that people with high emotional intelligence will be much more aware of their situation, are happier, healthier and more successful in their areas of expertise. This is also in accordance with Souders (2009) who stated that self-development is a process to have a trait-personal traits such as self-awareness, awareness of others, empathy, and so on and it can be shaped in many ways and can be designed, structured and directed to form a desired trait. This means that when counselor trainees have emotional intelligence in themselves, the traits that lead to self-development as a prospective counselor will exist level by level.

If viewed in terms of the strength of the relationship, the results of this study show that there is a positive significant relationship between emotional intelligence and counselor trainees' self-development, but the correlation  $r(128) = .301, p < .05$  is low. According to Salkind (2009), this value can be categorized as a weak relationship between these variables. This is likely to occur as, if seen from the level of counselor trainees' personal growth in this study, the majority of them are still at moderate level and based on Stoltenberg (1998), they are in phase two of self-development as counseling trainees. This stage is known as the level of trial and difficulty. Based on the integration developmental model (Stoltenberg, 1998), counseling trainees in the second level are not balanced in terms of motivation, confusion and anxiety besides being more focused on the client, but sometimes they are disappointed not to provide the best to the client when feeling confused and being in doubt haunts them. At this time, counselor trainees' emotions are not in a balanced state and this may account for the existence of a weak relationship between emotional intelligence and counselor trainees' self-development.

## IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

The present study, however, makes several noteworthy contributions in the counseling field. It appears that emotional intelligence and counselor trainees' self-development models ought to be used by educators in counseling programs in institutions of higher learning in Malaysia as a guide to educate and realize the potential of an effective counselor. The study confirmed that emotional intelligence is an important aspect of training in counselors' self-development at Malaysian public universities. This is also supported by the model used by researchers of the Four Branch Emotional Intelligence Model by Mayer and Salovey (1997) in which the theories and models support the Integration Developmental Model (IDM), introduced by Stoltenberg (1998) in the process of the counseling trainees' self-development. From the findings of the study, we also can conclude that counselor trainees also knew the needs to face and respond with the client not only by using counseling skills learned from the class but also can conclude that emotional intelligence is one of the important aspects or components in counselor trainees' self development in Malaysia in facing and delivering the best professional counseling service to their clients after they graduate from the university.

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