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**THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON THE
POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS**

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Abstract

This paper discusses the importance of strengthening emotional intelligence (EI) among youths to achieve more integrated human domains. Human capital resources targeting youths are one of the main thrusts of national development in Malaysia especially from the political, economic, social and educational aspects. The main purpose of this study was to test the presence of and the significance (if any) of the relationship between EI competence and the constructs determining youths' political behaviour. A total of 313 students from four public universities in Malaysia were selected as the sample. The Emotional Intelligence Self-Description Inventory (EISDI), and Political Behaviour Questionnaire (PBQ) were used to obtain data which was analysed using correlation and regression analysis. The findings showed that the two hypotheses were accepted, i.e. there is a correlation between EI with political behaviour which significantly influenced EI on the constructs of political behaviour namely conservatism and nationalism. Hence, EI can be construed to be a determining factor in behaviour and ideology that signifies political maturity among Malaysian youth.

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Keywords: Emotional intelligence, political maturity, behaviour, youth.



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1. Introduction

Students in public universities are significant drivers of national development. Malaysian history is replete with youths in educational institutions who have participated in the struggle for independence. Youths have always been in the forefront as leaders who can move the nation towards a more prominent position on a global scale (Mohd Fuad et al., 2012). However, youth, as voters, have their own perceptions of national leadership (Junaidi et al., 2012). This can be seen through various movements by the youth in the print media, new media and through open demonstrations (Institute of Youth Research IYRES, 2016). However, students have lately become aggressive turning to radical approaches, resulting in a degree of concern among stakeholders in issues involving national politics. Human resource development focusing on youth is a priority in pushing the national development agenda. According to the Malaysian Youth Development Research Institute (Institute of Youth Research IYRES, 2016), the largest number of youth in Malaysia are in the 20 to 24 year age group numbering 2.92 million. Hence, how this group thinks and acts is of utmost concern to the stakeholders concerned with national development.

In recent years, youths have exhibited uncertainty in the selection of national leaders based on results of the Malaysian general elections (Mujibu Abd Muis et al., 2010). As university students, these youth who comprise the front-line of knowledge in public universities, play an important role in contributing ideas to national development and determining the political structure of the country (Saha & Print, 2010). Their (lack of) EI can be a decisive factor in the creation of a more mature leadership style and political maturity among these students (Mohamad Naqiuddin et al., 2012). As such, it is imperative that a consistent mechanism be applied through relevant models and approaches among students in public universities to help generate more positive emotions, thinking and behaviour as Malaysia is a country that values harmony and stability in all aspects. Therefore, the implementation of a model to nurture EI among public university students in Malaysia is crucial as these EI skills may be effective in helping to control and manage their emotions, thinking and behaviour in terms of their political maturity.

Today, EI has been given special attention with regard to its function and role in human life. Emotions are exhibited by every individual in the form of actions aimed at fulfilling the individual's self-esteem and it refers to situations in which feelings are reflected in the individual's physiology, thinking, behaviour and psychological processes (Mahmood Nazar, 1992). In short, the emotional response is a set of automatic, visceral and emotional communicative responses such as facial expressions, words, gestures and behaviours exhibited by the individual. Salovey and Mayer (1990) are among the psychologists who began to introduce EI in 1990.

Fariza (2005) emphasized that young people today have many emotional and anxiety problems. Hence, the application of values is required to educate the young generation in a positive manner. Gottman et.al. (1997) pointed out that aggressive behavior is a direct impact of low EI whereby when the situation becomes too intense, these low EI individuals fail to manage their anger resulting in a lack of empathy for others. The youth nowadays, can also be seen as overly influenced by materialistic elements and a lack of positive values. This lack of positive values can be attributed to a system of socioeconomic development that does not prioritise materialistic development with values development. University students are ultimately going to become national leaders (Mohd Fuad, 2012) and it is very worrying that

future national leaders may lack EI in dealing with political issues. It is hoped that the influence of the youth in the political sphere and, by default, national development will occur in a positive and constructive environment, rather than in a damaging or destructive one. It is undeniable that personality affects an individual's behavioural and political outlook (Baranowski & Weir, 2010). Students' political ideology and behaviours can influence national well-being and safety; thus, it is imperative that this group of youths are guided to think and behave more productively for the security of the people and the country (Mohd Fuad et al., 2012).

A study of awareness and political behaviour among students in eleven public universities in Malaysia conducted by Mohd Fuad et al. (2012) found that students frequently attended left wing political lectures outside campus. Political youth activism in the national elections can be traced through the manner and style of engagement in campaigning, their passion in expressing their support for the party of their choice and aggressiveness in mobilizing the political party machinery. The trend of youth voting is said to be very significant in ensuring the victory of a political party. Teh Fui Khim (2001) in his study explained that there was an increase in youth misconduct which showed that they were weak in controlling and exhibiting their emotions in a more positive direction. In fact, an article in a national newspaper *Sinar Online* (2013) also talked about the way youth expressed their views on the politics of the country by demonstrating, rioting or by making humiliating comments in social media. The article commented that this was not a sign of mature political behaviour; instead it was a sign of irresponsibility, indicating a lack of good manners and discretion. Clearly then, there is a need for emotional stability in today's youth so that problems can be solved in a prudent and knowledgeable way.

Although the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU) has existed in Malaysia for decades, many are fuzzy about the true meaning of this act. The AUKU mentions the interests of all parties including the government, society, university and also students. Lacking a deep understanding of this Act, students were found to be depressed because they thought they were flogged and under control of this act. Incident by incident, for example, university students demonstrating and protesting the government by conducting street rallies to pollute the image of the country in international currency. Furthermore, the negative actors are from high-powered youth students. The assumption that only political factors are solely responsible for the formulation of the AUKU should be inaccurate because the economic, cultural and social aspects contribute to our political agenda. According to a report by Noor Sulastri Yurni Ahmad (2015), most youths who have always wanted a change in the political landscape of the country on the ground are fed up with the ruling party, yet still do not have adequate political knowledge and a low level of rationality.

Khairy Jamaludin (2015), the Minister of Youth and Sports, stressed that the government's decision to amend Section 15 (AUKU) in 2012 was to provide space for students to engage in more political events. The amending of the act signified the government's openness towards students' participation in political activities. He added that previously in Section 15 of the AUKU, students were not permitted to participate in or show support for political parties, but, with the amendment, any action taken against the student would be only because of infringement of state law, or university rules, but not because they are involved with politics.

2. Problem Statement

Clearly, there is a need for a real understanding of political behaviour among students because there is still much ambiguity regarding why many of them are unable to control their emotions in a rational or positive manner when faced with political turmoil, thus translating into a formidable, defensive and opposing majority in the country. Such a scenario cannot help to realize the aspirations of the people and the country to live in harmony while working to achieve the agenda for development. Political maturity and behaviour are prerequisites for a stable government and more importantly, a stable, secure country. Political instability can lead to the social and economic destruction of a nation, as evidenced by a number of nations in the world today facing economic and social ruin.

3. Research Questions

This study aims to analyse the EI of university students by measuring their EI competencies like identifying emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions and managing emotions. In addition, this study highlights the political behaviour of students through two constructs of political behaviour, i.e. conservative, and nationalism. With this, the influence of EI on the political behaviour among students can be analysed. The main questions driving this research are:

- Is there a relationship between EI competence and the constructs of youth's political behaviour?
- What is the significant impact of EI competence on the constructs of youth's political behaviour?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study can help Malaysian government agencies or NGOs by identifying the extent to which youth's EI is significant in the relationship and impact between EI and political maturity among students as youth in universities. The relationship between these variables can further explain that if political issues are laid out maturely and rationalized by the community, government and youths, they will be able to assess the reality of the nation's success in navigating physical and human development. Such knowledge can highlight the positive role of EI so that behaviour will become more dominant towards peace and not trigger polemic and propaganda that can undermine the noble values of society in achieving universal peace, despite the fact that there will be various politics ideologies relevant to the issues faced by the people and the nation. Therefore, EI approaches can be used as a guideline in driving political maturity in youth that is relevant and in line with national needs and the context of unity.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Research Design

This is a non-experimental study and also a form of field studies which uses descriptive statistics and regression. Field studies are relevant for use in this study due to its high reliability, and relatively low cost (Maimunah, 1992). This study is also descriptive and based on hypothesis testing, because, according to McIntyre (2005), hypothesis testing can lead to the interpretation of the independent variables in two or more factors in certain conditions. In this study, correlation testing was conducted to describe the

relationship between the variables and regression testing was done to describe the effect or influence of the variables.

5.2. Research constructs

The constructs of conservatism and nationalism were chosen for this study as it is relevant to the pattern of behavior and political ideology of the people in this country, resulting from the history and chronology of colonial occupation. These constructs constitute the legacy of the people's thinking and political style of politics in the country

Conservatism can be understood as an ideology that wants to conserve the traditional institutions. The conservative orientation that opposes social change is rooted in the ideology that "the essence of conservative beliefs is the passionate confirmation of the value of the established institution" (Cook, 1974). Hence, any national transformation which is considered as uprooting the established institution will be rejected by conservatives as it would threaten existing principles and stance.

Nationalism as an ideology is related to the defense of the sovereignty of a country by creating the concept of a shared identity by a group of people. These behaviors are considered as social as they relate to "the sharing of the relevant societies in the economy, politics, religion, education, ethnicity, and other social areas" (Kerlinger et al., 1976). Nationalism is apparent in upholding and defending the spirit of nationhood either through the spirit of partisanship or through activities outside political parties.

Hence, the justification of utilising these two constructs in Malaysia coupled with EI in this study is to investigate if there is a relationship between EI and, if so, the extent to which EI affects these two constructs. If indeed there is any such relationship and effect, then, it is crucial to emphasize the cultivation of EI among students to ensure that their patterns of political thinking and behavior and political ideology are mature and manageable for the well-being of all.

5.3. Research Location

The research location covered four public universities in Malaysia which are representative of the public universities in Malaysia. Currently, there are 20 public universities in Malaysia. For the purpose of this study, the universities were divided into four zones; North, South, East and West. Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia were selected to represent the east, north, west and south zones respectively. The study focused only on the public universities meaning that private universities and colleges were not included in this study. The reasons for this is that only students in certain public universities are required to take the Malaysian Studies course which is a core subject. Having studied this subject, students in public universities would be more aware of and attuned to national issues.

5.4. Subjects

Only students of public universities who were enrolled into the Malaysian Studies subject at the time of this study were selected as the study sample. A total of 313 undergraduates aged between 19 to 30 years were selected as the sample. This sample was meant to represent the youth in higher educational

institutions in the country. Students were selected from several faculties in the selected universities, so that the study would determine the EI of students across a good representative spread of disciplines.

The possibility of sampling error is 5% for the sample size formula by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), developed using 95% confidence interval at 0.05. Systematic random sampling method was used in the process of selecting the sample for this study.

5.5. Research Instruments

The Emotional Intelligence Self-Description Inventory Questionnaire (EISDI) (Groves et al., 2006) was used in this study to measure the EI of the sample through the domains of perception of emotions, appraisal of emotions, understanding emotions, and facilitating thinking with emotions. Each of the four domains is measured by 6 items, making it a total of 24 items. The response scale used was (1) *strongly disagree*, (2) *disagree*, (3) *undecided* (4) *agree*, (5) *strongly agree*.

The Political Behaviour Questionnaire (PBQ) (Siti Sarawati et al., 2017) was used to measure political behaviour according to the constructs of conservatism and nationalism. Ten items were designed to measure the two constructs, conservatism and nationalism, which gave a total of 20 items. The scale of response is: (1) *strongly disagree*, (2) *disagree*, (3) *undecided* (4) *agree*, (5) *strongly agree*. The construction of the items for this instrument was based on the definition of construct based on literature review for this topic which emphasizes two constructs namely conservatism and nationalism which are relevant to the nature of this study. Two panels of experts in this field validated the instrument.

Both these surveys have a relatively high reliability value. The validity of the constructs was determined using Kaiser-Meyer-Oldin (KMO) factor analysis. The total KMO for the EISDI was .624, and for PBQ it was .681. Factor analysis at more than 0.60 needs to be proven by KMO, and all the constructs of this study were established at more than 0.60.

6. Findings

Correlation and regression analysis were implemented to analyze the data obtained in this study. This correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the EI competence and the constructs related to the sample's political behaviour. Next, the regression analysis was used to test the impact of EI on the political behaviour of the sample.

Table 01. Correlation of EI Competence and the Constructs of Youth's Political Behaviour

Variable	Conservative	Nationalism
	Pearson Correlation	Pearson Correlation
	.587*	.134*
Emotional Intelligence	Sig. (.000)	Sig. (.018)

Table 01 shows that the result clearly displays a significant relationship between EI competence and the constructs of youth's political behaviour; conservatism at 0.000 and nationalism at 0.018.

Table 02. Impact of EI Competence on the Constructs of Youth's Political Behaviour

Variable	Conservative			Nationalism		
	R ²	F	B	R ²	F	B
	.345	31.60	.587*	.018	2.48	.134*
Emotional Intelligence	Sig. (.000)			Sig. (.018)		

* Significance = p <.05

Table 02 above shows the results regarding the impact of EI Competence on the constructs of youth's political behaviour. The findings from the simple regression analysis indicate that EI ($\beta = .587$, $p <.05$) is significant as a factor that impacts on conservatism as a construct of political behaviour. Table 2 also shows the impact of EI competence is statistically significant [$F (1, 160) = 31.60$, $p <.05$] on conservatism by contributing 34.5% of variance in conservatism to the value of $R^2 = .345$ and $\beta = .587$. This indicates that EI can be regarded as a significant predictor of conservatism, albeit with a relatively small amount of variance. EI was found to be a significant factor that impacts on nationalism ($\beta = .134$, $p <.05$) showing a statistically significant impact [$F (1, 160) = 2.48$, $p <.05$] on nationalism with a contribution of 13.4% of variance in nationalism, as well as the value of $R^2 = .018$ and $\beta = .134$. The findings show that EI among young students can impact on political behaviour in terms of conservatism and nationalism. This is a good sign that youths need not go to extremes in translating their support for the political party of their choice. With EI, youths can be more fascinated in and engaged in positive political and ideological behaviours in the country, without damaging the nation's reputation and their own political growth. In addition, EI will enable youths to operate with equilibrium in thinking and behaviour in terms of their emotions. With this more positive political behaviour, youth can play their role as a co-leaders of the state to create a political culture that is more mature and prosperous for the sake of harmony and progress of the country. This concurs with the report by Noor Sulastri Yurni Ahmad et al. (2015) which emphasized that youths need to have sufficient political and state knowledge and a high degree of rationality to create a more mature political culture. Similarly, Teh Fui Khim (2001) emphasized the need for youths to be more adept at controlling emotions so that each problem and dissatisfaction can be better dealt with in a rational, civilised manner as befits Malaysian cultural norms.

7. Conclusion

These findings stress the importance of EI skills to assist students to think rationally and feel positive as a community who are far-sighted about the politics of the country. Hence, it is proposed that students are assisted through the adequate training of EI skills in the application of appropriate political behaviour and ideology development. The relationship between the variables in this study can enlighten the relevant stakeholders on how the youth's interest in politics can be trained towards a more mature and rational approach. Positive EI training can help to retrain behaviour to prioritise peace, by emphasising positive values in thinking and behaviour. The discussion explores the extent to which EI among university students, as first-class human capital, can help shape a more mature mind and behaviour for the harmony and peace of the nation. The current national and global political realities highlight the need for youths to stabilize emotionally, think rationally and behave positively.

Youth, as an integrated entity, are expected to value and assess the (political) reality of the country's success in navigating the physical and human development (Mohd Fuad et al., 2012). Generally, the responsibility of creating an ideal group of young people does not depend solely on intellectual prowess but also a heightened EI in tandem with spiritual intelligence. A strong EI will create a community of youths who are dynamic in terms of communication, appearance, spirit, thought and behaviour. It is not impossible that we can emerge as a nation of people admired globally for our political maturity and behaviour.

The implication of this study is to highlight the function and importance of EI among university students who play a crucial role in national development by helping them to be more stable and rational in emotion and thinking. Such stability will lead to positive behaviours that are the main pillars of political stability which can prevent the occurrence of various conflicts and crises. Each political issue can be addressed through prudent negotiations and not through prolonged disagreements through mass media and speculation that can trigger hatred and enmity which can seriously damage the country's peaceful existence. In conclusion, our strength as a nation is not as a sophisticated war machine, nor is it to become an aggressive warlike nation. Our strength lies in our rational, scientific, positive attitudes and solidarity in society (Siti Sarawati, 2017). Everyone, especially the youth who are the heirs of the national leadership, can and must contribute not only in terms of energy and time, but also in terms of expertise, knowledge and influence of positive values that can be emulated together. These, and not hatred and enmity, are the forces that will always be our main fortress as a sovereign state in a politically insecure and unstable transformation period.

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