The Relationship between Burnout and Trait Emotional Intelligence among Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between Burnout and Trait Emotional Intelligence (TEI) among 30 secondary school teachers in Malaysia. The participants were administered the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator's Survey (MBI-ES) which breaks burnout into three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). The TEIQue-SF self report questionnaire was also used to elicit information on the respondents' EI. Descriptive Statistics, including mean and standard deviation, was used to analyze the data. Pearson Correlation Analysis was also used to analyze the correlation between the teachers' Burnout and TEI scores. Guilford's (1973) Rule of Thumb was used to determine the strength of the relationship. The results showed significant correlation only between Depersonalization (DP) and TEI. Implications of the study are discussed, and suggestions are given for further research.

Keywords: Burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment and trait emotional intelligence

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Job burnout involves a long period of frustration with work, loss of motivation that lingers physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. Herbert Freudenthal (1973), a psychologist, coined the term 'burnout'. He mentioned that Job Burnout is a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward. According to Maslach and Pines, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment are the three dimensions of burnout (1984). The phenomenon of job burnout among English Language teachers in Malaysia has become an issue not only in primary level but also secondary and tertiary levels.

Emotionally intelligent individuals can cope better with life's challenges and control their emotions more efficiently (Taylor, 2001). Harrod and Scheer (2005) also hold that emotional intelligence is the driving force behind the factors that affect personal success and everyday interactions with others. Teaching is one of the most stressful occupations (Johnson et al., 2005; Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1977). Frequently identified sources of stress and decreased job satisfaction include the following: inadequate salary and perceived low status of the profession (Carlson and Thompson, 1995; Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978); role conflict and ambiguity (Dunham, 1992); time pressure (Chan, 1998); student misbehavior (Turk et al., 1982); relationships with supervisors (Litt and Turk, 1985); and large class size (Burke and Greenglass, 1994). Teachers also experience intense, emotion-laden interactions on a daily basis and have a great number of emotional demands compared to most other professionals (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). In the teaching profession, stress and emotional demands can lead to emotional and physical exhaustion, cynical attitudes about teaching, reduced feelings of personal accomplishment, and lower job satisfaction (Guglielmi and Tatrow, 1998; Shan, 1998; Vandenberghe and Huberman, 1999).

There are abundant research which focused on these emotional demands and their impact on teachers' well-being, mental health, stress, burnout, and job satisfaction as well as on learning outcomes for students (Chan, 2006). Relatively little is known, however, about protective factors against teacher stress and burnout. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between Burnout, consisting of three subscales (Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA)) and Trait Emotional Intelligence (TEI) which consists of 15 subscales organized under four factors (Well-Being, Self-Control, Emotionality, and Sociability) and Global Traits, based on Petrides and colleagues' (2001) trait EI model of personality.

1.2 Problem Statement

This study investigates the relationship between Burnout and TEI among 30 secondary school teachers in Malaysia. Little research is done in Malaysia, on the relationship between burnout and TEI among the secondary school teachers. Thus, this research aims to study the relationship between Burnout and TEI among the teachers and to find whether good emotion control leads to lower levels of job burnout.

1.3 Objectives and research question

The major purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between Burnout and TEI among secondary school teachers in Malaysia. Therefore, this study set out to explore the following questions:

1.Is there a significant relationship between Emotional Exhaustion and TEI among secondary school teachers in Malaysia?

2. Is there a significant relationship between Depersonalization and TEI among secondary school teachers in Malaysia?

3. Is there a significant relationship between Personal Accomplishment and trait (EI) among secondary school teachers in Malaysia?

1.4 Hypotheses

To study the relationship between TEI and Burnout, the researchers tested the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant relationship between Emotional Exhaustion and TEI among secondary school teachers in Malaysia.

H2: There is a significant relationship between Depersonalization and TEI among secondary school teachers in Malaysia.

H3: There is a significant relationship between Personal Accomplishment and TEI among secondary school teachers in Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

Emotional intelligence can be beneficial in many areas of life and the application of its usefulness has been most frequently documented in the professional workplace. A c c o r d i n g t o Cherniss (2000) there are four main reasons why the workplace would be a logical setting for evaluating and improving emotional intelligence competencies: emotional intelligence competencies are critical for success in most jobs, many adults enter the workforce without the competencies necessary to succeed or excel at their job, employers already have the established means and motivation for providing emotional intelligence training and most adults spend the majority of their waking hours at work.

Petrides (2011) mentioned that emotional intelligence is vital in work areas, leadership and management, team

and project work and all types of customer relationship. If affects our family and social life. TEIor trait emotional self-efficacy) is defined as a constellation of emotional self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies (Petrides et al., 2007). The construct provides a comprehensive operationalization of the affect-related aspects of personality and lies wholly outside the taxonomy of human cognitive ability (Carroll, 1993). TEI essentially concerns individual differences in people's self-perceptions of their emotional abilities.

Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue- SF; Petrides, 2009; Sevdalis et al., 2007) is a 30-item questionnaire designed to measure global TEI. TEI and ability EI are two distinct constructs differing in many important ways. As expected, the conceptual differences between the two constructs are directly reflected in emerging empirical findings, which reveal very low correlations between measures of ability and TEI (O'Connor and Little, 2003). Ability EI questions tend to focus on measurement issues, including the development of criteria for defining correct responses and the internal consistency, factor structure, and construct validity of the tests. In contrast, TEI questions tend to focus on the relationships of the construct to the major dimensions of personality, with special reference to issues of discriminant and incremental validity.

The criticism most frequently leveled against TEI is that it is indistinguishable from the major personality dimensions. Recent work, however, has demonstrated the discriminant and incremental validity of TEI against the Giant Three (psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism) and the Big Five (extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience) personality dimensions (Petrides and Furnham, 2003; Saklofske et al., 2003).

With respect to organisational applications, the amount of empirical data available is in inverse proportion to the barrage of unsubstantiated claims. However, scientific research is beginning to emerge in this domain too. For example, Wong and Law (2002) provided evidence that TEI may be positively related to job performance and job satisfaction.

The trait approach to personality is one of the major theoretical areas in the study of personality. Trait theory is focused on identifying and measuring these individual personality characteristics. Psychology evolved out of both philosophy and biology. Discussions of these two subjects date as far back as the early Greek thinkers including Aristotle and Socrates. The word psychology is derived from the Greek word *psyche*, meaning 'soul' or 'mind.' Thus psychology is the studies about human mind and behavior.

In psychology, self-efficacy is a term used roughly in corresponding to a person's belief in his/her own competence. It has been defined as the belief that one is capable of performing in a certain manner to attain a certain set of goals (Ormrod, 2006). Our personalized ideas of self-efficacy affect our social interactions in almost every way, so understanding how to foster the development of self-efficacy is a vital important goal for positive psychology because it can lead to living a more productive and happy life.

A study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and burnout among 104 Iranian EFL teachers to examine the teachers' differences on EI and burnout with respect to demographic variables. The results obtained through using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation showed that there were significant negative correlations between EI and burnout, burnout, teaching experience and age and positive correlations between teachers' EI, teaching experience, and age (Shahin and Nasser, 2011).

Marca et al. (2010) studied the relationship between emotion regulation ability (ERA), burnout and job satisfaction among British secondary school teachers ($N = 123$), using the Mayer – Salovey – Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). They also examined the mediating effects of affect and principal support on these outcomes. ERA was associated positively with positive affect, principal support, job satisfaction, and one component of burnout, personal accomplishment. Two path models demonstrated that both positive affect and principal support mediated independently the associations between ERA and personal accomplishment as well as ERA and job satisfaction (Marca et al., 2010).

Another research done in Korea, regarding emotional intelligence, emotional exhaustion, and job performance, examined how emotional intelligence (EI) affects emotional exhaustion (burnout) resulting from emotional labor, and how emotional exhaustion influences an individual's job performance in terms of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. In the research, partial least squares regression analyses were conducted on data from 295 retail sales employees in South Korea. Based on the four factors identified in the EI model developed by Schutte et al. (1998), three (appraisals of emotions, optimism, and social skills) were negatively associated with emotional exhaustion but the fourth factor (utilization of emotion) showed no significant links with emotional exhaustion. Based on the findings, emotional exhaustion was found to be negatively related to

job performance in terms of organizational commitment and job satisfaction and the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion was confirmed in the relationship between job performance and appraisals of emotions, optimism, and social skills as factors in emotional intelligence (Tae and Won, 2011).

The need for a strong interest in the professional applications of emotional intelligence is apparent in the way organizations have embraced emotional intelligence ideas. The American Society for Training and Development, for example, has published a volume describing guidelines for helping people in organizations cultivate emotional intelligence competencies which distinguish outstanding performers from average ones (Cherniss and Adler, 2000).

There is considerable research in the emotional intelligence field which has focused on leadership, a fundamental workplace quality. Before the research in the area of emotional intelligence had begun, the Ohio State Leadership Studies reported that leaders who were able to establish mutual trust, respect, and certain warmth and rapport with members of their group were more effective (Fleishman and Harris, 1962). This result is not surprising as many researchers have argued that effective leadership fundamentally depends upon the leader's ability to solve the complex social problems which can arise in organizations (Mumford et al., 2000).

Research on the predictive significance of E.I. over I.Q. was spurred by Goleman's initial publication on the topic which claimed that emotional intelligence could be as powerful, and at times more powerful, than I.Q. (Goleman, 1995).   This claim was based much on past research revealing that the predictive nature of I.Q. on job performance was not promising, with I.Q. accounting from 10-25% of the variance in job performance (Hunter and Hunter, 1984; Sternberg, 1996).   The results of longitudinal studies further implicated emotional intelligence as being important. A study involving 450 boys reported that I.Q. had little relation to workplace and personal success; rather, more important in determining their success was their ability to handle frustration, control emotions, and get along with others (Snarey and Vaillant, 1985). This study did not attend to emotional intelligence directly, but the elements which it addressed (the ability to regulate one's emotions and understand the emotions of others) are some of the central tenants of the emotional intelligence construct.

As research exists supporting the contention that emotional intelligence does contribute to individual cognitive-based performance over and above the level attributed to general intelligence (Lam and Kirby, 2002), current theories tend to be more judicious regarding the incremental benefits of E.Q. over I.Q. Both Goleman (1998) and Mayer et al. (1998) emphasize that emotional intelligence by itself is probably not a strong predictor of job performance. Instead, it provides a foundation for emotional competencies which are strong predictors of job performance.

Goleman (2001) theoretically clarifies the relationship between I.Q. and E.Q. (emotional intelligence), and their respective applicability to job performance. He describes I.Q. as playing a sorting function, determining the types of jobs individuals are capable of holding. He theorizes that I.Q. is a strong predictor of what jobs individuals can enter as well as a strong predictor of success among the general population as a whole. For example, in order to become a medical doctor, an individual requires an above average I.Q. Emotional intelligence, on the other hand, is described by Goleman (2001) as a stronger predictor of who will excel in a particular job when the levels of I.Q. are relatively equal. When the individuals are being compared to a narrow pool of people in a particular job in a certain organization, specifically in the higher levels, the predictive power of I.Q. for outstanding performance weakens greatly. In this situation, emotional intelligence would be the stronger predictor of individuals who outperform others. Thus, the doctors in a particular clinic would all have similarly above average I.Q.'s. Goleman (2001) would hypothesize that what would distinguish the most successful doctors from the others would be their levels of emotional intelligence. Success is not based on our skills, knowledge and experience only, but it also depends on how we manage our emotions. Emotional intelligence involves managing ourselves and interacting effectively with other people. Understanding ourselves and other people can lead us to our goals.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants consisted of 30 secondary school teachers from the district of Hulu Langat, Selangor, Malaysia.

3.2 Instruments

TEI Que-SF and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator's Survey (MBI-ES) served as the research tool in this study. The participants' demographic information, including their age, gender and years of teaching experience, was also elicited. TEI Que-SF was used to evaluate the teachers' TEI. To measure the teachers' burnout, the

Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator's Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach et al, 1996) was used. It is a 22-item self report instrument consisting of three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). Participants respond on a seven-point frequency rating scale, ranging from 'never' (0) to 'every day' (6). High scores on the EE and DP subscales and low scores on the PA subscale indicate burnout.

3.3 Research procedure

Self-administered questionnaires were used to gather data in this study. The questionnaires were distributed to the teachers during their break hours. They were given 20 minutes to answer the questions and the instruments were collected for data analysis.

4. Results and discussion

In this study, SPSS (version 16) was used to analyze the data. In order to measure the relationship between TEI and the three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA), Pearson correlation test was used. When the results were obtained, Guildford's (1973) Rule of Thumb was applied to interpret the strength of the correlation between variables. According to this rule, a correlation coefficient of below 0.20 shows a 'negligible' relationship; 0.20 to .040 means a 'low' relationship; 0.41 to 0.70 indicates a 'moderate' relationship; 0.70 to 0.90 shows a 'high' relationship; and a coefficient of more than 0.90 suggests a 'very high' relationship (Guildford, 1973).

The results and interpretation of the findings are presented in this section. Table 1 shows the results of the first research question that concerned the relationship between EE and TEI:

Table 1. Relationship between Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and TEI

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
SUMEE	23.4667	9.33194	30
SUMTEI	1.4767	19.04502	30

Correlations

		SUMEE	SUMTEI
SUMEE	Pearson Correlation	1	-.229
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.223
	N	30	30
SUMTEI	Pearson Correlation	-.229	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.223	
	N	30	30

According to the Pearson Correlation results for H1, the correlation coefficient (r) was -0.229. Based on Guildford's (1973) Rule of Thumb, this would suggest a negative and low relationship between Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and TEI of the secondary school teachers. The negative relationship would indicate that a decrease in TEI would lead to an increase in Emotional Exhaustion (EE). The results, however, showed a significant value of p=.223 which is more than alpha at .05 level of significance. Therefore, the first null hypothesis is failed to be rejected. That is, there was not sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that the negative relationship between EE and TEI is statistically significant.

Table 2 presents the results of the second research question; that is, the relationship between DP and TEI:

Table 2. Relationship between Depersonalization (DP) and TEI

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
SUMDP	8.8333	5.32453	30
SUMTEI	1.4767	19.04502	30

Correlations

		SUMDP	SUMTEI
SUMDP	Pearson Correlation	1	-.471**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	30	30
SUMTEI	Pearson Correlation	-.471**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	30	30

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

According to the Pearson Correlation results for H2, the correlation coefficient (r) was -0.471. Based on Guildford's (1973) Rule of Thumb, this would suggest a negative and moderate relationship between DP and TEI. The negative relationship indicated that an increase in Depersonalization (DP) could decrease TEI. The results also showed a significant value of p=.009 which is less than alpha at .05 level of significance. Therefore, the second null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant and negative relationship between DP and TEI.

Table 3 demonstrates the results of the third research question that focused on the relationship between PA and TEI:

Table 3: Relationship between Personal Accomplishment (PA) and TEI

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
SUMPA	31.2000	5.64709	30
SUMTEI	1.4767	19.04502	30

Correlations

		SUMPA	SUMTEI
SUMPA	Pearson Correlation	1	.003
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.989
	N	30	30

SUMTEI	Pearson Correlation	.003	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.989	
	N	30	30

According to the Pearson Correlation results for H3, the correlation coefficient (r) was 0.003. Based on Guildford's (1973) Rule of Thumb, this would suggest a positive and negligible relationship between Personal Accomplishment (PA) and TEI of the secondary school teachers. The positive relationship indicates that an increase in Personal Accomplishment (PA) could lead to a decrease in TEI. The results also showed a significant value of p=.989 which is more than alpha at .05 level of significance. Therefore, the third null hypothesis is failed to be rejected. That is, there was not sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that the positive relationship between PA and EI is statistically significant.

5. Conclusion

This study focused on the relationship between Burnout, consisting of three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA) and Trait Emotional Intelligence (TEI) among 30 secondary school teachers in Malaysia. Based on the findings, there was not sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that the negative relationship between EE and TEI as well as the positive relationship between PA and EI is statistically significant. However, the negative relationship between DP and TEI was found to be statistically significant.

The main limitation of this study was its small sample size that could have caused Type I error; that is failing to reject a null hypothesis that is in fact false. Therefore, further research seems necessary to obtain sufficient evidence to support the hypotheses. The findings of this study cannot therefore be generalized. Further research could focus on the detailed facets of TEI which consist of 15 subscales organized under the four factors and a global trait : Well-Being, Self-Control, Emotionality, and Sociability as well as Global Traits, based on Petrides et al.'s (2001) trait EI model of personality.

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