

EFFECTIVENESS OF EMOTIONAL COMPETENCY MODULE TRAINING ON ADOLESCENTS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

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ABSTRACT:

The current study aimed to measure the effect of emotional competency module training in increasing the emotional intelligence and decreasing automatic negative thoughts. A quasi-experiment with a pre and post-test design and a control group are used where 58 participants were chosen using multi-stage involving purposive, convenience and stratified sampling techniques; 32 in the experimental group and 26 in the control group. Findings showed that there was a significant difference between the pre and post-test of the experiment group for both overall emotional intelligence scores and automatic negative thoughts. The paired samples t-test analyses revealed a significant difference in the emotional intelligence scores between the pre-test ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 0.35$) and post-test ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.43$) scores; $t(31) = -6.02$, $p = 0.00$ of the experimental group. The automatic negative thoughts scores between the pre-test ($M = 50.88$, $SD = 0.35$) and post-test ($M = 40.94$, $SD = 18.27$) of the experimental group was significant ($t(31) = 3.024$, $p = 0.01$). This suggest that the Emotional Competency Module was effective in improving emotional intelligence for the secondary school students and reducing the automatic negative thoughts by the participants. An important implication of this study lies in its credibility to be utilised by mental health practitioners to help enhance adolescents' emotional control.

Keywords:

Emotional Competency Module, effectiveness, emotional intelligence, automatic negative thoughts.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are at risk of developing negative behaviours at their age. Behaviour may be shaped at a younger age, but their rationalization of each behaviour become crucial at the adolescence stage. The emotional and behavioural problems experienced by adolescents relate to broken attitudes and cognitive issues such as negative cognitive errors (Leung & Poon, 2001; Flouri & Panourgia, 2014).

Research Background

Emotional intelligence can be learnt and improved anytime as scientists have recognized that emotional

intelligence is much easily improved compared to intelligence (Ozcan & Zaaroglu, 2017; Goleman, 1998; Shapiro, 2002). Studies on the human brain reveal that emotional intelligence skills development is easier from birth to the adolescent development phase hence making teaching emotional intelligence crucial when children are still schooling (Ozcan & Zaaroglu, 2017). Moreover, teaching emotional intelligence and positive thinking can help enhance mental health and self-efficacy (Shahbazzadegan et al., 2013).

Adolescents experience increased negative thoughts which may lead to delinquent and suicidal behaviours. Negative thoughts or cognitive distortions has been widely studied to cause depression among adolescents (Choon et al., 2015; Rohany Nasir, Ahmad, Yusoff, & Khairudin, 2010; Rohany Nasir et al., 2016; Teo & Say, 2012). Meanwhile, the emotional and behavioural problems experienced by adolescents relate to broken attitudes and cognitive issues such as negative cognitive errors (Leung & Poon, 2001; Flouri & Panourgia, 2014).

Problem Statement

The main concern is that students have average emotional intelligence. Studies showed that overall emotional intelligence among adolescents in Malaysia was average (Sulaiman, Tanjung & Md Khalid, 2013; Perveen et. al, 2018) in which they scored high in the resilience and social intelligence level but scored average in the emotional awareness and emotional expression levels (Rahman et al., 2009). Moreover, Veni et al. (2018) found that the emotional intelligence of adolescents was lower than adults.

Adolescents lack comprehension of the importance of dealing with their negative emotions to encourage better handling of personal and social emotions. Alpatanni (2015) agreed saying that “*the most prevalent problems affecting adolescents in Malaysia today are emotional*”. Simsek and Serin (2017) and Coetzer (2016) revealed in their studies that emotional intelligence has an impact on negative thoughts among university students.

Research provide evidence of the existence of a relationship between cognitive distortions and depression (Blake et al., 2016; Marton et al., 1993; Nyarko & Amissah, 2014; Rohany Nasir et al., 2016; Rohany Nasir et al., 2010) whereas another research showed that cognitive distortions was shown in

people who attempted suicide (Jager-Hyman et al., 2014).

Sefetullah Kuldass et al. (2015) stated how previous curriculums in the Malaysian education have failed to train the cognitive ability among students who make up most adolescents in Malaysia. The review of studies reveals the importance of dealing with emotions and cognitive distortions to be able to address issues faced by adolescents using a different approach. Hence, this new Emotional Competency Module was tested to see if a new and valid approach could help in dealing with the problem faced by adolescents.

Research Objective

This study aims to investigate the effect of the Emotional Competency Module training on the emotional intelligence and automatic negative thoughts levels of adolescents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Direktor, Simsek, and Serin (2017) which investigated the negative automatic thoughts, emotional intelligence as well as the demographic details of university students involving 170 females and 121 males. Findings showed that there was a significant difference between the students' ability to manage emotions and the students' ability to understand the emotions of others with automatic negative thoughts. Participants who scored normal or super normal in the emotion managing subscale and understanding others emotion subscale have higher negative automatic thoughts scores. However, no significance was found in the ability to understand own emotions subscale and negative thoughts. Moreover, Flouri and Panourgia (2014) also mention that automatic negative thoughts mediated life stress, emotional and behavioural issues hence suggesting developing programs that will help deal with negative automatic thoughts to reduce adolescent's emotional and behavioural problems. Mean-

while, negative thinking styles were found to moderate the relationship between positive affect and resilience (Judd, 2015).

Gender has a somewhat uncertain relationship with emotional intelligence. Bibi and Saqlain (2016) and Wu et al. (2014) showed that there was no significant difference between gender in self-esteem which is a construct of emotional intelligence. Likewise, an independent t-test analysis showed that females scored higher in emotional intelligence compared to males (Bibi & Saqlain, 2016) similar to findings by Ensari (2017) which showed that females had a better ability in detecting microexpressions, before and after a training and a research by Bacon, Burak, and Rann (2014) which showed that trait emotional intelligence was higher for females. However, many other researches indicate that gender does not affect the level of emotional intelligence (Adigwe, 2015; Wilks, Neto, & Mavroveli, 2015; Romero, Master, Paunesku, Dweck, and Gross, 2014; Bacon, Burak, & Rann, 2014; Liu, Wang, & Lü, 2013). This is also similar to a study by Lim (2011) which found that there were no significant difference in actual and self-estimated EQ level among undergraduate students in a private university in Malaysia. Therefore, the researcher concludes that there is no significant difference between gender in terms of emotional intelligence.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quasi-experiment design. Quasi-experiment is an experiment conducts on two groups, which are experiment group and control group. The experiment group received a training based on the Emotional Competency Module activities. Meanwhile, the control group went through their conventional teaching and learning methods practiced at their respective school.

Research Sampling

A total of 58 participants, 32 in the experimental group and 26 in the control group joined the study and the results were finally analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). There are multi stages of sampling involved in this study. At the beginning a stratified sampling technique is used during the screening test involving 100 Form 4 students. This is because there are 10 classes for Form 4 in the selected secondary school. Hence, to provide equal opportunity for all students of the same cohort, 10 students were randomly selected from each class to participate in the pre-test. In the final screening process, only 80 students fulfilled the control factor requirements. Initially students were randomly selected to participate in each group. However, due to issues with attendance on the day of the training, they were conveniently assigned to either the experiment or control group.

Research Instruments

Both groups answered the pre and post-test instruments which are the the Universiti Sains Malaysia Emotional Quotient Inventory (USMEQ-i) developed by Muhamad Saiful Bahri, Ahmad Fuad and Ab Rahman (2010) and the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ) instrument with good validity, reliability as well as one that has undergone proper back-to-back translation into Malay by (Oei & Mukhtar, 2008). The ATQ was developed by Hollon and Kendall (1980).

Data Analysis

The data was obtained from pre-test and post-test of the two instruments scores which was later analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program. Descriptive data analysis was used to look for the differences of percentage and mean for pre-test and post-test in treatment group

and control group. An independent and paired samples t-test analyses method was also done.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Figure 1 shows the descriptive results for the overall emotional intelligence scores of the pre and post-test analyses.

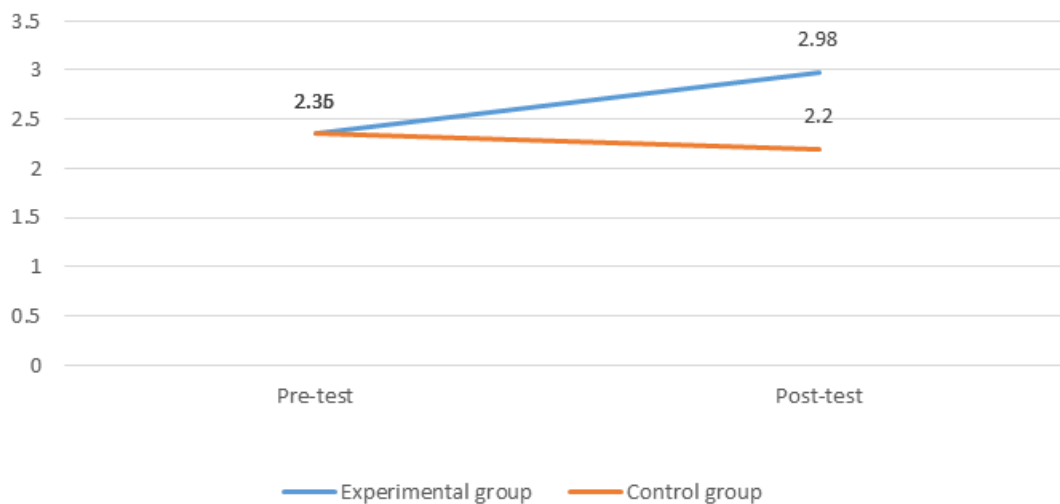


Figure 1 The line graphs depict the mean difference between the pre and post-test scores of the emotional intelligence variable.

Figure 1 shows that before the module implementation, the experimental group participants have a higher score of emotional intelligence, $M = 2.36$ ($SD = 0.35$) compared to the control group, $M = 2.35$ ($SD = 0.34$). Later, after the module was implemented on the experimental group, the experimental group maintain as the higher scoring group in

emotional intelligence with a mean of 2.98 ($SD = 0.43$) in the post-test. Again, the control group scored lower in emotional intelligence with a mean of 2.20 ($SD = 0.58$) in the post-test. Figure 2 shows the descriptive findings of the automatic negative thoughts variable.

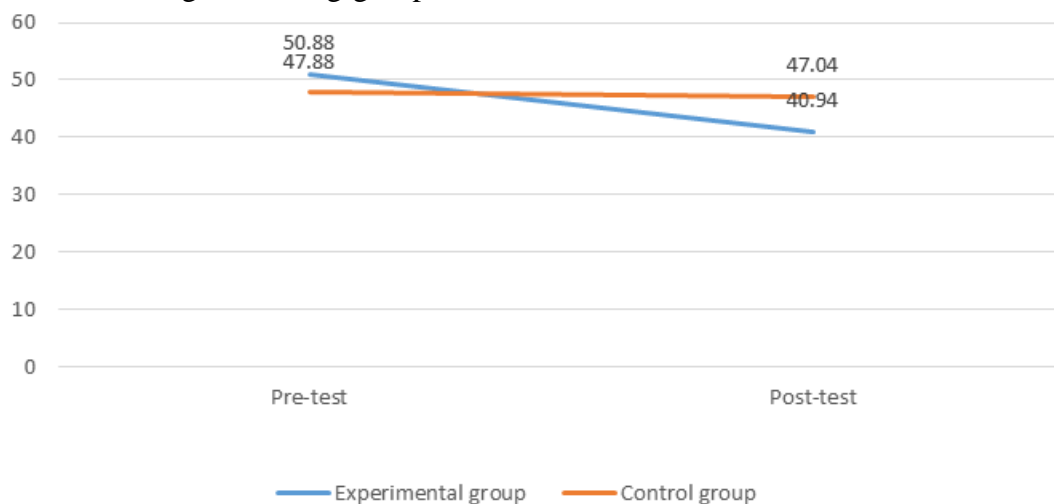


Figure 2 The line graphs depicts the mean difference between the pre and post-test scores of the automatic negative thoughts variable.

Before the Emotional Competency Module implementation, there is a considerable decrease of 9.94 in automatic negative thoughts between the pre and post-test scores. Similarly, there was also a slight

decrease of 0.84 in automatic negative thoughts between the pre and post-test scores.

Table 1 reports the results of the independent samples t-test analyses for the pre and post-test emotional intelligence scores.

Table 1 Independent samples t-test results of overall emotional intelligence

Variables		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Standard Error Difference
Pre-test emotional intelligence	Equal variances assumed	1.170	56	0.866	0.016	0.092
	Equal variances not assumed	1.171	54.259	0.865	0.016	0.091
Post-test emotional intelligence	Equal variances assumed	5.87	56	0.00*	0.78	0.13
	Equal variances not assumed	5.69	45.009	0.00*	0.78	0.14

* $p < 0.05$

The independent-samples t-test indicated that there were no significant difference between the experimental group ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 0.35$) and the control group ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 0.34$), $t(56) = 1.170$, $p > .05$ in the pre-test emotional intelligence.

Hence, the results reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the pre-test scores of emotional intelligences between the experimental and control group. This finding suggest that the pre-test groups were homogenous before the module implementation.

Meanwhile, the independent-samples t-test indicated that the experimental group ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.43$) scored significantly higher than the control group ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.58$), $t(56) = 5.87$, $p < .05$ in the post-test emotional intelligence scores. This means that the emotional intelligence scores varied significantly after the module implementation.

Table 2 report the t-test results for the automatic negative thoughts analysis between the groups.

Table 2 Independent samples t-test results of automatic negative thoughts

Variables		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Standard Error Difference
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Pre-test automatic negative thoughts	Equal vari- ances as- sumed	1.71	56	0.09	2.99	1.75
	Equal vari- ances not assumed	1.80	51.52	0.08	2.99	1.67
Post-test automatic negative thoughts	Equal vari- ances as- sumed	-1.41	56	0.17	-6.10	4.34
	Equal vari- ances not assumed	-1.45	55.77	0.15	-6.10	4.22

* $p < 0.05$

The independent-samples t-test indicated that there were no significant difference between the experimental group ($M = 50.88$, $SD = 7.89$) and the control group ($M = 47.88$, $SD = 4.65$), $t(56) = 1.71$, $p > .05$ in the pre-test automatic negative thoughts.

Hence, the results fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the pre-test scores of automatic negative thoughts between the experimental and control group. These findings suggest that the pre-test groups were homogenous before the module implementation.

Whereas, the independent-samples t-test indicated that there is no statistical significance between the experimental group ($M = 40.94$, $SD = 18.27$) and the control group ($M = 47.04$, $SD = 13.86$), $t(56) = -1.41$, $p > .05$ in the post-test automatic negative thoughts scores. Therefore, the results reported in table fail to reject the hypotheses that there is no significant difference between both the groups after the implementation of the module.

The paired samples t-test analyses revealed a significant difference in the emotional intelligence scores between the pre-test ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 0.35$)

and post-test ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.43$) scores; $t(31) = -6.02$, $p = 0.00$ of the experimental group. It was found that there was no significant difference in the emotional intelligence scores between the pre-test ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 0.34$) and post-test ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.58$) scores; $t(25) = 1.26$, $p = 0.22$ of the control group.

Meanwhile, the automatic negative thoughts scores between the pre-test ($M = 50.88$, $SD = 0.35$) and post-test ($M = 40.94$, $SD = 18.27$) of the experimental group was significant ($t(31) = 3.024$, $p = 0.01$). The paired samples t-test for the post-test automatic negative thoughts scores ($M = 47.04$, $SD = 13.86$) was not significantly different from the pre-test automatic negative thoughts scores ($M = 47.88$, $SD = 4.65$) in the control group; $t(25) = 0.303$, $p = 0.764$.

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings for the emotional intelligence variable revealed that the H1a, H1c and H1d hypotheses are accepted. Meanwhile H1b is rejected as there was a

significant difference between the pre and post-test of emotional intelligence. The findings for the automatic negative thoughts variable revealed that the null hypotheses H2a and H2c are accepted. Whereas the null hypotheses H2b and H2d are rejected as there was a significant difference between the pre and post-test of the experiment group and between the post-test groups.

The Emotional Competency Module showed evidence of enhancing emotional intelligence similar to a study by Nareman Aly Mohamed, Nagwan Mohamed Madbouly and Eman A. Monem A. Rashid (2017). Although the age groups in that study are different, we cannot really rule out the fact that providing an emotional competence enhancing module could indeed show positive results. The results suggest that the Emotional Competency Module was not only effective in improving emotional intelligence for the secondary school students but also succeeded in reducing the automatic negative thoughts by the participants. This may be a tool for students as well as professionals to utilise the module to further enhance emotional control and be able to manage their emotions well in future.

At the same time, the findings of the study is also in line with findings by Nareman Aly Mohamed, Nagwan Mohamed Madbouly and Eman A. Monem A. Rashid (2017). They tested a programme on suicidal ideations, among attempted suicide adolescents which showed significant improvement in emotional intelligence. This study has a similar target population as the current study. The evidence supports the findings of this study that troubled adolescents could be helped with the use of activities which specifically help build emotional competence. The same conclusions were drawn for children with emotional and behavioural problems that were living with single parent families by Motamedi, Ghobari-Bonab, Beh-pajoo, Shokoohi Yekta and Afroz (2017) that revealed how effective

a program can be in enhancing emotional intelligence. Moreover, successful studies by Garaigordobil and Pena-Sarrionandia (2015) and Vijayalaxmi and Kadapatti (2013) in enhancing adolescent emotional intelligence also supports the findings of this study.

In terms of emotional competence building activities, one of the activity in the module whereby students have to be able to express their emotions through writing had good feedback and the overall findings suggests that the activity could help enhance students' competence level. This is supported by a previous study by Castillo and Fisher (2017) where expressive writing was effective in enhancing emotional intelligence.

The findings are useful for future studies to include other aspects of intelligence and to enhance the program to better suit for age groups other than adolescence. Findings also indicate the possibility of not only improving the emotional intelligence but also automatic negative thoughts which are the basis of many mental illnesses such as depression (Stikkelbroek, et al., 2018). Therefore, the module has the potential to improve the usual practices by counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists to help with their treatment or intervention strategies.

Besides, Punia, Dutta & Sharma (2015) emphasised the importance usefulness of Goleman's emotional intelligence concept and that it can be taught. This was shown in the findings of this study. Indeed, emotional intelligence can be taught and that it is possible to embed programs such as this for adolescents. This in turn would help address the emotional and behavioural issues that adolescents face.

Aaron T. Beck's infamous theory of depression introduced that emotional problems occur due to negative thinking patterns and that altering the

thinking process can help reduce these problems (Simmons & Griffiths, 2014). Therefore, the Emotional Competency Module helps translates this theory into activities that can help to reduce negative thinking styles.

Future studies may need to focus on methods to retain the participants throughout the implementation of the module. As this only involves adolescents, the module could be further validated by using different implementation methods. This study used a continuous program with no intervals. Perhaps the module could be more effective if intervals were present in between each domain or a different sequence of activities is utilised. These possibilities are always open to be explored in future studies.

In addition, the ‘cognitive triad’ by Aaron T. Beck was conceptualized as the three components of the negative thinking schema which are the feelings and thinking of self, the world and the future (Sunita, Kumar & Behmani, 2017). The significance of the results suggests associations between the triad and emotional competency which could be explored further in future studies.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study successfully trained facilitators in delivering sexual education to the students using *Self-concern Sexual Education Module*. This study found that the efficiency of facilitators in terms of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes related to the sexual education increased after coaching training program using *Module* was given to them. Thus, it is expected that this study will give tremendous benefits and contributions to all parties and be one of the main reference in the field of sexual education in Malaysia.

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