

The Mediating Role of Follower Orientation, Self-Regulation Between Emotional Intelligence and Internalization of Higher Education

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to investigate the mediating effect of self-regulation and follower orientation on the relationship between emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education. The study used non-experimental quantitative approach for data analysis. The data was collected from top five universities of Malaysia (n = 210) and was analysed using partial least square structural equation modelling. The results revealed that emotional intelligence is positively and significantly related to internationalization of higher education. The relationship of emotional intelligence with self-regulation and follower orientation was also positive and significant. Moreover, the findings revealed that follower orientation significantly mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education. However, in contrast to our expectation, the relationship between emotional intelligence and internationalization was not mediated by self-regulation. The results, discussion, theoretical and practical implications of the study and direction for future research are discussed.*

Keywords: *Emotional intelligence; internationalization of higher education; self-regulation; follower orientation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been a topic of interest in organizational psychology, e.g. (Chen, 2011; Lee, 2019; Rodrigues, Jorge, Pires, & António, 2019; Stogdill, 1963; Wong & Law, 2002). For the most part, researchers have provided theoretical and empirical arguments for a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and important work outcomes, including employees' job performance (Langhorn, 2004), job satisfaction (Nghah, Jusoff, & Rahman, 2009), and servant leadership style (Lee, 2019). Emotional intelligence has also been found to create cohesion among team members (Black, Kim, Rhee, Wang, & Sakchutchawan, 2019). Despite some clear cut evidence of the effect of emotional intelligence on individual and organizational outcomes, several areas remain to be investigated. First, emotional intelligence has been measured in several different ways, which include self-report measures

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(Petrides, 2010, p. 137), other reported measures (Wong & Law, 2002), and performance-based tests (Freudenthaler and Neubauer, 2005). These different measurements of EI may lead to different conclusions, which we address in this study.

Second, scholars have long examined the influence of EI on employees' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Espinosa, Akinsulure-Smith, & Chu, 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2019). However, its relationship with transformational leadership traits such as follower orientation and self-regulation is unclear, which we examine in this study. Third, this study also intends to examine the influence of EI, follower orientation and, self-regulation on internationalization of Higher education in Malaysia.

“Internationalization of higher education refers to the promotion of the educational objectives, function and teaching courses to the international and trans-cultural or global level” (Chen, 2011). The internationalization of higher education not only improves the performance of institutions but also plays a vital role in the development of a nation. Therefore, an investigation of the antecedents of internationalization of higher education such as EI, follower orientation and self-regulation is warranted, especially in developing countries such as Malaysia.

Fourth, most of the studies have investigated the direct influence of EI on individual and organizational outcomes. However, recent literature revealed that the relationship between EI individual and organizational outcomes is mediated by other variables, such as leader-member exchange (Jordan & Troth, 2011), organizational learning capability (Chiva & Alegre, 2008), perceived social support (Rey, Extremera, & Sánchez-Álvarez, 2019), and employees' creativity (Rodrigues et al., 2019). Indeed, some variables have been investigated as a mediator between EI and work outcomes; however, the mediating role of follower orientation and self-regulation have not been investigated, which is the focus of this study.

In doing so, the present study makes several theoretical contributions to the field of emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education. First, this study extends our understanding of the antecedents of the internationalization of higher education, such as EI, follower orientation, self-regulation. This study also elucidates the influence of follower orientation, self-regulation on the internationalization of higher education. Moreover, the present study fills the gap in the literature by specifying the mechanism through which EI is related to the internalization of higher education, which, to the best of authors' knowledge have not been investigated. Most of the previous studies in the context of higher education have focused on employees' attitudes such as job satisfaction and turnover intention (Kakar et al., 2019; Kakar et al., 2018; Rahimi et al., 2013). This study intends to focus on the performance of higher education, which has scarcely been investigated. Finally, this study has methodological advantages by applying second generation statistical techniques such as PLS-SEM for data analysis.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to a “set of interrelated abilities at the interface of emotion and cognition, including perceiving, understanding, using, and managing emotions” (Lopes, 2016), pp 213. According to (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016), the appraisal of emotions, management of emotions, understanding of emotions, and the utilization of emotions are major components of EI. The appraisal of emotions allows individuals to assess their own and others' emotions, while the management of emotions reflects an individual ability to control their owns and other emotions (Ouellet, Langlois, Provencher, & Gosselin, 2019; Scott-Ladd & Chan, 2004). The third component, understanding of emotions, reflects an individual ability to understand emotions of himself/herself and others precisely and accurately. The last component of EI is the utilization of emotions, which refers to the use of emotion in problem-solving (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Thus, a person with high emotional intelligence has the capacity to perceive, understand, appraise, and utilize his or her emotions and emotions of others to adapt to a particular context (Duckett & Macfarlane, 2003). Prior research has also shown that person with high emotional intelligence are productive, successful and happier (Kulshrestha

& Sen, 2006), concerned with the emotions of others (Lam & Kirby, 2002), and are often perceived by their subordinate as effective leaders (Barling, Slater, & Kevin Kelloway, 2000).

Emotional Intelligence and Internationalization of Higher Education

Internationalization of higher education has become an important phenomenon for the educational institutions and educational industry. This phenomenon is getting attention of research in Asia-Pacific countries (Neubauer, Mok, & Edwards, 2019). For educational institutions across the globe, the institutional and political projects are commonly termed as “internationalization” (Tadaki and Tremewan 2013). The internationalization of higher education also refers to the integration of international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the mission, goals, and delivery of higher education (Heck & Mu, 2016). Research demonstrates that the internationalization of higher education not only improves the performance of institutions but also assists in building politically and economically competitive regional blocks (Khodakarami, P., & Zakaria, Z. 2017; Egron-Polak, 2012). It also helps in the development of an effective workforce and citizenship (Green, 2003). For these reasons, researchers’ interest is increasingly growing to identify the number of factors that may enhance the internalization of higher education.

One of the factors that may enhance the internalization of higher education is the emotional intelligence of leadership of higher educational institutions. Leaders who are high in emotional intelligence are often perceived as a role model by their followers (Sitter & Longbotham, 2013). Therefore, they are better able to invoke a positive attitude among the workforce of higher educational institutions. Furthermore, leadership with high emotional intelligence are better able to understand the feeling and emotions of self and others (Mayer et al., 2016) and provide immediate feedback to the employees. Likewise, emotional intelligence is found to have a profound influence on selecting employees (Rathi, 2014). Malik & Shahid (2016) also found that emotional intelligence enhances the effectiveness of leadership and also improves the performance of the leader. Indeed, previous studies have shown the positive influence of emotional intelligence on individual and organizational outcomes; however, its influence on the internalization of higher education has scarcely investigated. Following the previous discussion, we presume that higher education leadership with emotional intelligence are more likely to enhance the internalization of higher education. Hence, we propose that:

H1: Emotional intelligence is positively related to the internalization of higher education in Malaysia.

Emotional intelligence and self-regulation

Self-regulation refers to the process of directing, controlling, and correcting one’s problem-solving actions or thought toward the attainment of a particular goal (Aspinwall, 2004). A person who is highly self-regulated is found to be more productive and successful in the achievement of individual and organizational goals (Shores & Shannon, 2007; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1996). Furthermore, research also revealed that a leader that can regulate his own emotions and actions are likely to perform better and avoid unethical behaviors when under pressure (Gaddy, Gonzalez, Lathan, & Graham, 2017; Leung, 2005). Moreover, research has shown that self-regulated individuals not only achieve their own objectives they also help in the attainment of organizational goals. For example, organizations with self-regulated leadership and employees enjoy competitive advantages over rival firms, and are more productive, and adjust themselves to the external challenges.

Owing to the importance of self-regulation, research interest is growing to explore the antecedents of self-regulation. Although antecedents of self-regulations are limited (Geeraerts et al., 2019), some studies shows that that employees self-regulation is shaped by the cognitive appraisal of work situations such as hindrance and challenges (Prem, Scheel, Weigelt, Hoffmann, & Korunka, 2018), the individual differences (VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum Jr, 1999) and self-efficacy (Maddux, 2016). Although previous studies have investigated a limited number of antecedents of self-regulation, however, research on emotional intelligence as an antecedent of self-regulation is limited. Following the previous literature, we presume that emotional intelligence may have a significant influence on self-regulation. A person who has

more control on his or her emotions are more likely to have authority on his behaviours and actions. Thus, we propose that:

H2: Emotional intelligence is positively related to self-regulation.

Emotional intelligence and follower orientation

Follower orientations refer to subordinate believes or perceptions that they are willing and committed to following their leaders. According to (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017), one of the basic traits of leadership is to have a follower. As mentioned before, emotional intelligence is vital for the success of a leader. Studies' have shown that leaders high on emotional intelligence have the ability to invoke a positive feeling among the follower. This positive feeling about leadership may encourage subordinates to follow their leaders. Emotionally intelligent leadership are also found to enhance employee's commitment, motivation, and engendered a positive feeling among them (Mayer et al., 2016). Although studies on leadership and emotional intelligence are in abound; however, limited studies have investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and follower orientation. In this study, we presume that a leader who scores high on emotional intelligence is likely to be followed by subordinates. Therefore, we propose that:

H3: Emotional intelligence is positively related to follower orientation.

The mediating role of Self-regulation and follower orientation

Thus far, we have suggested that emotional intelligence is related to the internationalization of higher education. We have also shown that emotional intelligence is likely to predict self-regulation and follower orientation. In short, we expect that the relationship between emotional intelligence and internalization of higher education is mediated by two additional variables, namely self-regulation and follower orientation. Previous literature such as (Pinos, Twigg, Parayitam, & Olson, 2013; Schutte & Loi, 2014) also supports the notion that the effect of emotional intelligence on organizational and individual outcomes is not always straight forward, rather it is mediated by social support and transformational leadership. Hence, we expect an indirect relationship between emotional intelligence and the internationalization of higher education through self-regulation and follower orientation. We presume that a leader that scores high on emotional intelligence is likely to be self-regulated, an ideal role model for the subordinate, and is more likely to have a significant number of followers, which, in turn, is likely to enhance the internationalization of higher education. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H4: The relationship between emotional intelligence and internalization of higher education is mediated by self-regulation.

H5: The relationship between emotional intelligence and internalization of higher education is mediated by followers' orientation.

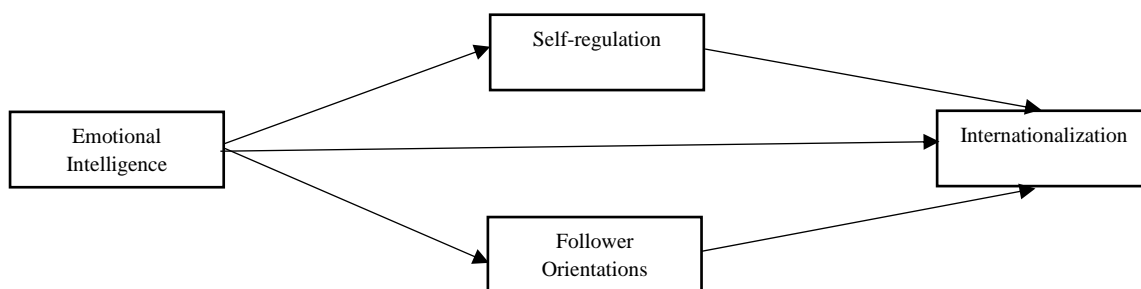


Figure 1: Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Sample

The leaderships of higher education institutions such as UTM, USM, UM, UPM, and UKM comprised the sample of the present study. The leadership includes universities' top management (Senate Members) and administration team. The data was collected from the respective respondents through online and paper-based surveys. Before data collection, each respondent was sent an email informing the respondents about the purpose of the study. The respondents were also ensured

the anonymity of the study and confidentiality of the respondents. Furthermore, questionnaires were also self-administered among the respondents. In total, 300 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents, of which 210 were returned. The demographic details of the respondents are as follows.

Table 1: Demographic Details

Demographic	Number of respondents (n =210)	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	163	56.8
Female	124	43.2
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	105	61.8
Single	65	38.2
<i>Age (Years)</i>		
21-25	4	2.4
26-30	50	29.4
31-35	46	27.1
36-40	37	21.8
40 and above	33	19.4
<i>Level of Education</i>		
Doctorate	6	3.50
Master of Philosophy	60	35.3
Master	102	60.0
Other	2	1.20
<i>Designation</i>		
Lecturers	114	68.2
Assistant Professors	49	28.8
Associate Professor	4	2.4
Professors	1	0.6

Experience (Years)		
1-5 Years	56	32.9
6-10	51	30.0
11-15	37	21.8
16-20	17	10.0
21 and above	9	5.3

Instruments

The instruments of the study were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” 7 to “strongly disagree” 1. Emotional intelligence was measured with 16 items. The sample item includes “I have good understanding of my own emotions”. Follower orientation was measured with 5 items. A sample item for the measurement of follower orientation includes “We continuously try to discover additional needs of our followers of which they are unaware”. Similarly, 10 items were used for the measurement of self-regulation. An example of the measure is “I can concentrate on one activity for a long time, if necessary”. Finally, for the measurement of internationalization of higher education, 15 items were used. The sample item is “Internationalization is specified as a top priority in my faculty/school’s mission and strategic plans”.

III. RESULTS

Table 2 depicts the descriptive statistics of the study that include mean, standard deviation, and correlations among constructs. The mean for all constructs of the study was slightly higher than the average and ranged between 5.98 to 6.09. The correlation between emotional intelligence and the internationalization of higher education was positive and significant (0.70**). Likewise, the correlation of emotional intelligence with self-regulation (0.82**) and follower orientation (0.69**) was positive and significant.

Table 2: Mean, Standard deviation (SD), and correlation

Constructs	Mean	SD	IHE	SR	FO	EI
IHE	5.98	.68	-			
SR	6.09	.64	0.71	-		
FO	6.05	.67	0.79	0.75	-	
EI	6.02	.69	0.70	0.82	0.69	-

Model Assessment

The model of the study was assessed using partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was used for the present study for the following reasons. First, the objective of the study is to explain variance in the dependent variable (internationalization of higher education). Second, the model of the present study is complex having a large number of indicators for a single construct, and the model also has mediation analysis. Scholars such as (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Sarstedt, Ringle, & Hair, 2017) encourage the use of PLS-SEM for a model that is complex and having

mediation analysis. Besides, previous researchers (Kakar et al., 2019) have also used PLS-SEM in the context of higher education. Therefore, PLS-SEM was an appropriate choice for the present study. Accordingly, as per (Sarstedt et al., 2017) recommendations, the model is assessed in two stages that are:

- (1) assessment of the measurement model and (2) assessment of the structural model.

Measurement model Assessment

The measurement model assessment involves the estimation of indicators and constructs reliability and validity. The measure of indicators' reliability is factor loading. According to (Hair et al., 2011) an item is said to be reliable if the values of factor loading are greater than 0.70 ($FL \geq 0.70$). In the present study, the factor loading of all the indicators exceeded the minimum thresholds of 0.70 and ranged between 0.701 to 0.891. Furthermore, the reliability of the constructs was estimated using Cronbach Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR). As per (Hair et al., 2011) guideline, the values of Cronbach Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR) were in acceptable range. The results in Table 3 show that all constructs are reliable.

Table 3: Constructs and indicators reliability

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
EI	0.919	0.930	0.509
FO	0.768	0.844	0.519
IHE	0.915	0.928	0.519
SR	0.881	0.905	0.515

The assessment of the constructs' validity includes convergent and discriminate validity. Convergent validity was measured with the Average Variance Extract (AVE). For a construct to be convergently valid, the values of AVE should be greater than ≥ 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 confirms that all constructs are convergently valid. Likewise, we calculated discriminate validity through Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The results of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion are presented in Table 4. It shows that the square root of AVE is greater than the correlations among constructs, hence all the constructs are discriminately valid. The result of HTMT 5 presented in the table also shows that constructs are discriminately valid because the values of HTMT are less than the minimum threshold of 0.90 as suggested by (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015).

Table 4: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Constructs	EI	FO	IHE	SR
EI	0.713			
FO	0.702	0.721		
IHE	0.697	0.705	0.720	

SR	0.823	0.720	0.688	0.718
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Table 5: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Constructs	EI	FO	IHE	SR
EI	-	-		
FO	0.835			
IHE	0.759	0.996	-	
SR	0.913	0.881	0.764	-

Structural Model Assessment

The assessment of the structural model provides an estimation of the path coefficient of the hypothesized relationship between the constructs. It also provides an estimation of the model explanatory power, such as the coefficient of determination. To assess the structural model, SmartPLS 3.2.8 was used. The result of bootstrapping (5000 resampling) shows that emotional intelligence is positively related to internationalization of higher education ($\beta = 0.173, t = 2.637, p < 0.05$). Thus, H1 is supported. The results also revealed that the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-regulation ($\beta = 0.823, t = 20.551, p < 0.05$), and follower orientation was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.702, t = 11.240, p < 0.05$). Thus, H2 and H3 are also supported.

The results of the mediation analysis show that follower orientation mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education ($\beta = 0.482, t = 7.667, p < 0.05$), hence providing support for H4. However, in contrast to our prediction, the results of the study do not provide support for the mediating role of self-regulation between emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education ($\beta = 0.042, t = 0.872, p < 0.383$). Hence, H6 is rejected.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to empirically examine the direct and indirect impact of emotional intelligence on the internationalization of higher education via two important mediators, namely self-regulation and follower orientation. The findings have shown that the direct impact of emotional intelligence on internalization of higher education was positive and significant. This finding is in line with conclusions that emotional intelligence is an important predictor of organizational performance. The results of the study also revealed that emotional intelligence is positively and significantly related to self-regulation and follower orientations. These findings are in line with the conclusions that emotional intelligence is an important determinant of transformational leadership traits such as self-regulation and follower orientation.

One interesting and significant finding of the study was the mediating role of follower orientation between emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education. Although studies on follower orientation as a mediator are minimal, however, this study findings support previous studies such as (Pinos et al., 2013; Schutte & Loi, 2014) conclusion that the effect of emotional intelligence on organizational and individual outcomes come through mediator. Furthermore, in contrast to our expectation, this study did not find support for the mediating role of self-regulation. Although previous

literature substantiates the mediating role of self-regulation (Padilla-Walker & Christensen, 2011; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1996), this study did not find any significant role of self-regulation as a mediator. The insignificance might be due to different contexts of the study.

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings of this study have offered a number of theoretical and practical implications. First, this study extends emotional intelligence literature by examining its influence on the internationalization of higher education in Malaysia. To date, emotional intelligence has scarcely been investigated in the context of higher education and, more specifically, in Malaysia. This study broadens emotional intelligence by identifying a mechanism through which the effect of emotional intelligence is carried out. This study has found that follower orientation explains the mechanism between organizational intelligence and internationalization of higher education, which, to the best of authors' knowledge has rarely been investigated. Furthermore, the study also elaborates that self-regulation does not explain the influence of emotional intelligence. These findings imply that context also plays an important in emotional intelligence literature. In other words, the study implies that the effect of emotional intelligence may vary across different contexts and cultures.

This study finding also provide practical implications for the management of higher education. The recruitment and upward movement of higher education staff that are emotionally intelligence is likely to improve the overall performance of higher education in general, and more specifically, the internationalization of higher education. Furthermore, the study reveals that emotional intelligence is likely to enhance the employees' self-control on emotion, feeling and emotions of others and also enhance individual problem-solving capabilities. Therefore, it is expected that with use of emotional intelligence the performance of the top management of the higher education institutions and performance of institutions can be improved.

V. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Though the findings provide interesting results, however, one should be cautious in interpreting the results of the study. This study has several potential limitations. The results of the study are based on data self-reported by the respondents; therefore, the possibility of common method bias and social desirability effect cannot be ignored. Further, the study is cross-sectional; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. We encourage future researchers to conduct longitudinal studies. Besides, the data were collected for five major universities in Malaysia, which may have resulted in poor samples. Therefore, we encourage future researchers to broaden the sample size of the study by including universities from each state of Malaysia. Though this study provides support for the mediation between emotional intelligence and internationalization of higher education, we encourage future researchers to examine another potential mediator such as transformational leadership, organization culture, and organizational culture.

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