

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) Competencies Among Malaysian Schools Counsellor

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ABSTRACT

Schools counselors played an important role to nurture and develop youths with quality characteristics. Challenges in this post-modernization era have resulted in heavy responsibilities towards molding a generation who can really appreciate the broad personality traits, possessing a high level of intelligence (IQ), high emotional intelligence (EQ), and unwavering spiritual intelligence (SQ). Schools counselor need to be proactive in finding effective approach to develop quality future generations. EQ has been recognized as a core competency for counselors to provide effective counseling services. This research reports two main objectives, which are the schools' counselors' EQ profile, and EQ's differences based on schools, gender, and age. The research was conducted by distributing Malaysia Emotional Quotient Instrument (MEQI) to 108 schools counselors, 46 (42.6%) from primary school and 62 (57.4 %) from secondary school. 50 (46.3%) of the respondents are male and 58 (53.7%) are female, aged between 25 and 54 years old. Descriptive statistics analysis (mean, standard deviation and percentages) was used to determine the first objective and univariate statistic (3-way ANOVA) was used for second objective. The overall findings show that schools counselors have high scores on the spiritual domain and maturity domain, followed empathy, self-awareness, social skills, self-regulation, and self-motivation. The findings also indicate that there is no EQ difference among counselors based on the three variables. These findings show that both primary and secondary school counselors either male or female aged below or above 40 years have approximately the same EQ. However, the scores obtained by the secondary school counselors are found to be slightly higher than the scores obtained by the primary school counselors, except in the maturity domain. The maturity score of the primary school counselors is (M = 94.35), which is slightly higher than the secondary school counselor is (M = 93.76). The study has proven that EQ is important competencies for schools counselors. Implication of the findings on schools counselors professional development were discussed.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, School Counselors, Guidance and Counseling Services, Psychology

1. INTRODUCTION

The national agenda on youth development in this country is to produce generation with a towering personality. School counselors played an important role to nurture and develop youths with quality characteristic. Challenges in this post-

modernization era have resulted in heavy responsibilities towards molding generation who can really appreciate the broad personality traits, possessing a high level of intellectual intelligence (IQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), and unwavering spiritual intelligence (SQ). Therefore, schools

counselors need to be proactive in finding effective approach in establishing quality future generation. Hence, the roles of schools counselor are increasingly getting attention by the community.

The 2nd National Parenting and Family Education Convention in 2004, organized by Malaysia Parent Pulpit Consensus National Parent (MAPIN) reported that "one of the methods of dealing with serious discipline problems among students is to appoint more schools counselor and to ensure the ratio is in accordance to the number of students "(Mohd Feroz, 2004 in Daily News, April 2005, p 6). According to the report, schools counselors who are well- trained to help people with problems are responsible not only in terms of monitoring student discipline but also to elucidate the career opportunities for students in future. These views reflect society's high expectations towards the leadership of schools counselor in fostering holistic excellence among students.

School counselor is important personnel for their responsibility in helping students to achieve psychological well-being. Rogers (1956) and Corey (2005, p.20) have pointed out that "the most important instrument you have to work with, as a counselor is yourself as a person". Aminah (1984) further confirmed that the success of counselling in schools depends on two factors: (i) the counsellor himself and (ii) the recognition of his superiors and members of the organization. Past research has shown that the personal qualities or personality of the counsellor is the most important ingredient in determining the effectiveness of counselling services (Brammer, 1993; Combs, 1982, Patterson & Eisenberg, 1983; Rogers, 1961; Samuel, 1996). To gain the confidence of the community, counsellors are urged to establish self-reliance in demonstrating effective ethical practices. Karen (2003) suggested that individuals who are in the counselling profession should gauge their self-ability as a building block towards becoming an effective and ethical counselor.

Combs (1982) viewed that the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the counsellor cannot be determined only through his techniques, but it certainly can be distinguished by looking at the personal beliefs and traits he possess. Some researchers

have formulated characteristics of effective quality of counsellors, encompassing knowledge in terms of (i) efficiency level in analyzing own feelings, (ii) self-worth and self-confidence, (iii) patience and loving nature, (iv) interpersonal awareness involving cultural experience, (v) the ability to be an influential model, (vi) prioritising others, (vii) flexible, and (viii) sympathetic and empathy (Belkin, 1981; Taiwo Hanbal, 1998; Kamaruzzaman Haji Jamal, 1995; and Ginger Lawrence & McDonald, 1999). The personal attributes are outlined in accordance with the constructs contained in Goleman Emotional Intelligence Model (1995 and Noriah et al, 2004).

Goleman Emotional Intelligence Model (1995 and Noriah et al, 2004) is divided into two types which are personal competence and social competence. Both of these competencies are represented by the seven domains measured, using a 183-item questionnaire named IKEM-MEQI (adult version). Domains studied include (i) self-awareness, (ii) self-regulation, (iii) motivation, (iv) empathy, (v) social skills, (vi) spirituality, and (vii) maturity. Emotional intelligence is a personal trait that can affect an individual's work performance, which is closely related to the attitude and work a person's values (Goleman, 1998). In the context of counselling services, emotional intelligence addresses a variety of issues, including the issue of cross-cultural clients (Constaintaine 2001: Easton 2004; & William 2004).

The success in multicultural counselling needs high sensitivity, especially in understanding the meaning of verbal and non verbal messages, different values and cultural needs of students (Hill 2002; Cormier & Cormier 1998; Sue & Sue, 1981). Thus, Goleman (1998) asserts that high emotional intelligence can be very important in helping counsellors to empathize and understand the problems related to the mental health of students from various cultural backgrounds. Efforts to address these issues in the context of local multiracial students require schools counselor to improve the quality of their emotional intelligence, especially the efficiency of self-regulation (involving emotional self-control abilities, self-confidence, accountability, adaptability and innovative) in order to avoid any cultural bias.

EQ competencies on counselling services at school strongly imply that the counselling teacher has to stay afloat to help clients despite having to deal with various problems. Counsellors who are not easily agitated nor disturbed in stressful situations; able to deal with people who are hostile without hitting back; and remain committed to perform tasks are considered to be resilient counsellors with quality (Cherniss & Goleman 2001; Shahril, 2003). Since EQ is a skill that can be learned and developed, a study to evaluate schools counselor' EQ should be carried out as a first step towards improving the quality of guidance and counselling services in schools. Awareness of EQ competencies is expected to contribute to job satisfaction, which could then be manifested in increased quality of guidance and counselling services in schools.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The issue on schools counselor' professionalism has gained the attention of various parties since the service was introduced in the 1960s. Various efforts towards strengthening the quality and professionalism of counselling is intensified and discussed in various settings (Amir, 1987; Mat Saat Baki, 2005; Zuria, 2005; Mohd Hasim Jamaluddin Othman & Mohaidin, 2005; Noriah Ishak, 2005; Zakiah Mohammad, 2005; Mohamad Hashim Othman and Syarifah Aminah Syed Ahmad, 2005).

Although various forms of professional development programs for schools counselor have been implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the related parties, negative views persist on the inefficiency of schools counselor in providing effective counselling. In fact, some schools counselor in both secondary and primary schools are still unclear of school expectations, vague about the duties and responsibilities of professionals, unable to align the practice of counselling with organizational culture. They fail to change mindsets while performing their duties and counselling activities, and sometimes fail to give effective solutions to the problems faced by the organization (Mat Saat Baki, 2005; Sidek Mohd Noah, 2004; Zakiah, 2005 and Mohamad Hashim Othman & Amnah Sharifah Syed Ahmad, 2006).

Their lack of competency influences the school's perception on the quality of schools counselor. A study by Mohamad

Hashim Othman and Sharifah Amnah Syed Ahmad (2006) shows that the confidence level towards schools counselor in schools has remained low. The personality quality and integrity of schools counselor are aspects being emphasised. The initial perception towards schools counselor in school was high. Schools counselor were seen as the personnel who have versatile leadership skills who can handle all kinds of problems that arise (Siti Halimah, 2003 and Masbah, 2005). nevertheless, high expectations seem inconsistent with the support and trust given to them (Suradi, 2005). On one hand, schools counselor are expected to prioritize their responsibilities on clinical counselling sessions to avoid the task been taken over by individuals who have no skills (Zuria, 2005). On the other hand, the school administrators want them to give priority to "mass" development programs according to the current needs of the school that are "urgent and important" (Mat Saat Baki, 2005 and Masbah, 2005). High expectations on counselling services impose a challenge that requires thoughtful outcomes by schools counselor. However, what are the implications of these challenges towards the emotional well-being, mental resilience and performance of schools counselor in fulfilling this professional responsibility?

Literature reviews show that schools counselor are confronted with many issues involving their work environment, the administrators, colleagues, students and parents (Abdul Karim Llin, 1998; Azmi Abd. Rahman, 2005; Gambang, 2005; Haslee Shahril, 2003; Siti Halimah, 2003; Salim, 1994, 2004, 2005). The diversity of issues faced may be regarded as a challenge by some dynamic schools counselor, but not many will view this phenomenon from the same perspective. Is there a possibility of an emotional outburst following the phenomenon that may threaten the psychological well-being and job performance of schools counselor? Past studies have found that full-time secondary school schools counselor in the country are suffering from work stress (Che Supeni, 2000, Siti Halimah, 2004 and Lukman, 2005).

Due to the stress, schools counselor prefer to teach in the classroom rather than becoming a school counsellor (Che Supeni Abd Ghani 2000 and Siti Halimah 2003). Shahril Abdullah (2005) carried out a study on 615 full-time counsellors on resilience and found that 67.32 per cent of full-

time counsellors are resilient while 32.68 per cent are not. He also found that there is a moderate positive correlation between sustainability and counsellor self-efficacy or beliefs ($r = 0.42, p < .05$). The results of the above studies show the existence of an emotional outburst among schools counselor concerning efficient service.

The next question is whether the provision of qualifications and educational training available is not enough to enable schools counselor to survive with the challenges in their career? What could be the contributing factors to the resilience and strength of schools counselor? Studies in the west has shown that emotional intelligence plays an important role in the working environment and has a significant relationship with self-esteem, resilience, and commitment (Bar-On 1997; Caruso 2004; Goleman, 1996; Mayer & Salovey 1997; Weisenger 1998; Constantine 2001; Evaston 2004; McManus 2001; & William 2004).

In fact, researchers have found that emotional intelligence and confidence in carrying out counselling responsibilities could be considered as the core competencies in developing a quality performance. Although studies on emotional intelligence have gained a place in the world of research abroad, not many researches on EQ involving schools counselor are done in the country. Since the world has recognized EQ as a critical factor in generating quality services, this study will look into this affective competence aspect among the schools counselor in primary and secondary schools in Selangor.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Definition of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to process emotional information accurately and efficiently (Mayer & Cobb, 2000; Mayer & Salovey, 1997, Robert Zeidner & Matthew, 2001). Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, (1999) has grouped emotional intelligence into four abilities that can work together in the process of decision-making, evaluation and leadership. The four abilities include the ability to (i) accurately perceive emotion, (ii) find out and generate emotions to assist thought, (iii) regulate emotions reflectively and (iv) include emotion into thought and action. These abilities have indirectly helped the emotional and intellectual

growth of a person. Goleman (1999) defines EQ as the ability to identify and manage an individual's emotions and effectively establish friendly relations with others, as well as self-motivation to complete the tasks. These organized abilities and non-cognitive skills competency can influence the success of a person while coping with the demands and pressure of the environment (Rueven Bar-On, 2000 and Martinez, 2002).

According to Goleman, the five key competencies of emotional intelligence involve the competencies of (i) self-awareness, (ii) self-regulation, (iii) motivation, (iv) empathy and (v) social skills. Weisenger (2000) defines emotional intelligence as the skill to use emotion as a guide in shaping the thinking and behaviour to achieve a goal. This definition is consistent with the view of Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (1999, 2000) which states that emotional intelligence is a construct that integrates emotions (personal skills and social skills) and thoughts in producing individual's behaviour. In short, EQ can affect an individual's ability to master the challenges and pressures in the environment schools in Selangor.

3.2 The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Counselling Services

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is a personal competence that should be possessed by every counseling teacher in order to be successful in his career. The identification of EQ provides valuable information to assess the effectiveness of counseling teachers which then becomes a catalyst to enhance personal qualities. Although EQ studies have been carried out extensively in a variety of settings, studies that link the competence with counseling teachers' professionalism have not been fully explored either locally or abroad. The importance of EQ in enhancing personal and work performance of counsellors have been proven through empirical studies (Constantine & Gainor, 2001; William, 2004; Easton 2004). Here is an explanation of the importance of these competencies in Dictionary of Occupation Titles (U.S. Development of Labor 1991); "the task of a counsellor is to assist individuals to understand and overcome social and emotional problems" and similarly, social perceptiveness is listed in the O* NET (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002) as the most important skill for mental health counsellors, along

judgement and decision making. Social perceptiveness is defined as “being aware of self and others’ reactions and understanding why they react as they do. Emotions certainly play a significant part in why people behave the way they do.” The ability to (i) listen to and understand information (empathy) and (ii) to identify a thing when it is wrong or will be wrong is called “social perceptiveness.” Social perceptiveness is the critical core of aptitude to become a counsellor. Competency in social perception, listening skills, and communication is related to the emotional intelligence construct.

The success of a counsellor in the counselling profession requires them to be able to appreciate the personal competence aspects (self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation) before being able to apply it to social competence (Noriah 2005). Appreciation of personal competence and social inclusion in the Goleman - Noriah Emotional Intelligence Model (2004), will not only contribute to the development of a counselling teacher’s personal qualities but it can even protect them from falling into behaviours that conflict with the Counselling Code of Ethics when carrying out professional responsibilities.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence among schools counselor in secondary and primary schools in Selangor. The research questions are:

1. What is the emotional intelligence profile of the primary and secondary school schools counselor in Selangor, Malaysia?
2. Is there any difference between primary and secondary school schools counselor’ emotional intelligence profile in Selangor Malaysia?
3. Is there any significant difference in emotional intelligence among schools counselor based on their background (school, sex and age)?

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This study employs a cross-sectional survey design, and the data was collected using a questionnaire. The quantitative

method used is compatible with the general purpose of the study which is to identify the profile and emotional intelligence differences among full-time schools counselor in Selangor (Creswell, 2005). The research samples consist of secondary school schools counselor who possess a counselling degree, and primary school schools counselor who have attended a fourteen-week in-service training (basic counselling training). These are schools counselor appointed by the Selangor State Education Department under the supervision of the Student Affairs Unit (UHEP).

These teachers were randomly selected from two districts (Kuala Selangor and Kuala Langat). There were altogether 108 schools counselor, 46 (42.6%) from primary school and 62 (57.4 %) from secondary school. 50 (46.3%) of the respondents are male and 58 (53.7%) are female, aged between 25 and 54 years old. For the purposes of this study, they were divided into two age categories: below 40 years old (N= 68 ,63%) of them and above 40 years old (N=36, 33.3%). 4 teachers (3.7%) did not specify their age., Descriptive statistics analysis (mean, standard deviation and percentages) was used to determine the first and second objective. This analysis will provide a detailed overview of the teachers’ EQ profiles. To determine the third research objective, Univariate statistic (3-way ANOVA) was used.

5.2 Research Instrument

This study used a set of questionnaires, the adult version of Emotional Intelligence Malaysia Instrument (MEQI) by Noriah et al. (2003). This instrument has been tested for its validity (validity) and reliability (reliability) through a pilot study that was conducted by several researchers. The recent internal consistency value in a pilot test on conducted by Syed Najmuddin (2005) is $\alpha = 0.966$. To determine the construct validity of the instrument, two approaches were used: evaluation of a number of psychology and counselling experts, and factor analysis.

5.3 Research Findings

5.3.1. EQ Profiles and the difference of emotional intelligence profile between primary and secondary school counsellors in Selangor.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 below show the profile and the difference of EQ profiles between primary and secondary school counsellors in Selangor. The results show high scores on the spiritual domain (M = 95.99 primary school), (M = 96.70 secondary school) and maturity domain (M = 94.35 primary school), (M = 93.76 secondary school). This is followed by (i) the empathy domain (M = 81.32 primary school), (M = 82.97 secondary school), (ii) the self-awareness domain (M = 78.43 primary school), (M = 79.91 secondary school), (iii) the social skills domain (M = 78.21 primary school) and self-regulation domain (M = 79.52 secondary school), (M = 78.20 primary school) and self-motivation domain (M = 78.35 secondary school), and (v) the lowest self motivation domain (M = 77.44 primary school) and social skills domain (M = 78.08 secondary school). Figure 3 shows the difference of EQ profiles between primary and secondary school counsellors. It was found that there is no significant difference between the two groups of respondents. In other words, the EQ profiles of the primary and secondary school counsellors are found to be more or less the same. However, the scores obtained by the secondary school counsellors are found to be slightly higher than the scores obtained by the primary school counsellors, except in the maturity domain. The maturity score of the primary school counsellors is (M = 94.35), which is slightly higher than the secondary school counsellor (M = 93.76). Figures 1, 2, 3 show the profiles and values obtained for each EQ domain between the two groups.

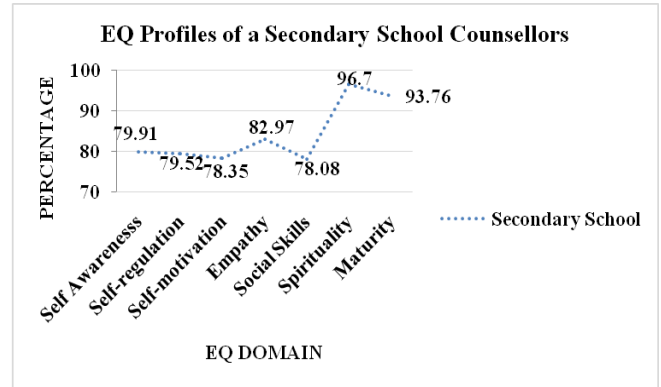
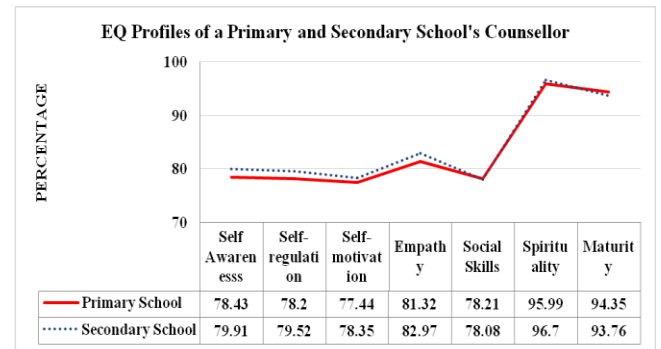


FIGURE 3. Comparison of EQ Profiles between Primary and Secondary School Counsellors



2. EQ differences among counsellors based on background (school, sex and age)

Table 1 below shows the EQ differences among counsellors based on background (school of tenure, sex and age). Through univariate analysis (ANOVA three-way), the value obtained is $F = 0.55$, $Sig = 0.46 > 0.05$ (EQ difference between primary and secondary school counsellors). Next is $F = 0.55$, $Sig = 0.46 > 0.05$ (EQ difference between male and female counsellors) and $F = 1.64$, $Sig = 0.20 > 0.05$ (EQ difference between counsellors aged below 40 with those above 40). These values indicate that there is no EQ difference among counsellors based on the three variables. These findings show that both primary and secondary school counsellors either male or female, aged below or above 40 years have approximately the same EQ.

The following results were found when viewed according to the value of eta squared (size effect): eta squared = 0.006 (school), eta squared = 0.006 (gender) and eta squared = 0.017 (age). According to Cohen's in Julie Pallant (2001) these values indicate that the independent variables involved in the study did not give a significant effect on the EQ of the counsellors. In other words, counsellors in the primary school

FIGURE 1 Primary School Counsellors' EQ profiles

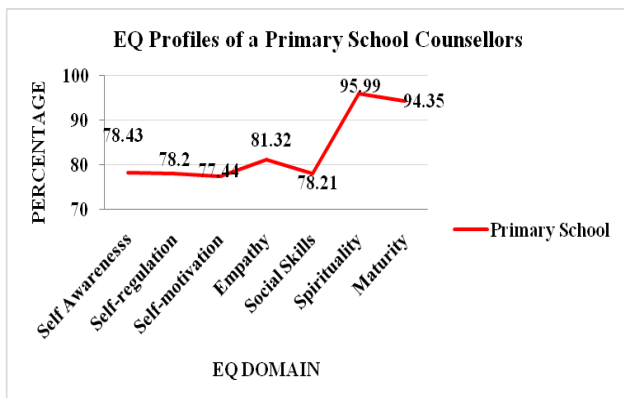


FIGURE 2. Secondary School Counsellors' EQ profiles

either male or female, below or above 40 years have more or less the same EQ mean.

Table 1 EQ differences among counsellors based on background (school, sex and age)

Independent Variables	TS	Df	MTS	F	Sig.	Eta square
School	14.21	1	14.21	0.55	0.46	0.006
Gender (Sex)	14.39	1	14.39	0.55	0.46	0.006
Age	42.82	1	42.82	1.64	0.20	0.017

Significant Level 0.05

TS= Total Squares

MTS= Mean Total Squares

Df= Degree of Freedom

6. DISCUSSION

In general, the results show that schools counselor of primary and secondary school counsellors, either male or female, below or above 40 years, have more or less the same EQ. In terms of EQ profiles, both groups obtained the highest score in the spirituality and maturity domains (over 90 percent). Schools counselor who are spiritually inclined have clear goals in life. They hold strong values and acceptance towards the Creator (Noriah et al.2004). Maturity is the ability to use life experience (yourself or the client) in order to assist schools counselor to do self regulation (Noriah et al. Syafrimen 2004). Maturity is associated with the ability to control negative emotions and be more positive towards all forms of past experiences (bitter/ sweet or successful/ failed).

Appreciation of spiritual values and maturity can be seen through attitude that is reflected in the daily life of the schools counselor concerned. Empathy is ranked third of the seven EQ domains for both groups of schools counselor. Indeed, empathy is an important characteristic of every counselling teacher which enables them to develop clients' potentials and characters. The ability to understand the feelings, needs and anxiety contributes to the establishment of a client-counsellor therapeutic relationship. This is an important factor in the problem solving process. The research findings have indirectly revealed the ability of schools counselor to appreciate love

which is the catalyst for empathy skills. This may be due to the diversity of personal experiences or client sharing sessions throughout their service.

Self-awareness is fourth in both groups studied. Self-awareness is the most basic domain (first) of the seven domains of emotional intelligence. Emotional awareness helps schools counselor to identify themselves with various aspects such as emotions, strengths and weaknesses, level of confidence, and the purpose or intent. Feat in this domain affects feat in other domains because emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996) is a "building block" to the construction of a higher emotional intelligence (starting with emotional awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, skills social, spiritual authority and maturity). Nevertheless, lack of awareness in this domain may affect the level of efficiency in the personal and social domains.

The findings of this study are consistent with Goleman (1996), in which primary school schools counselor scored moderately (between 75 to 80 percent) in social skills and self-regulation domain, followed by a low self-motivation domain. Similarly, secondary school schools counselor obtained average scores in self-regulation and self-motivation domain, and lower scores in social skills domain. This situation may be due to the self-consciousness domain of both groups that came in fourth out of the seven domains. All three domains (self-regulations, motivation and social skills) are related. Self-regulation involving self-control abilities, accountability, reliability, flexibility and innovative contribute to persistence and determination to complete a task on an ongoing basis, which is associated with the competency of self-motivation. The ability to control emotions when interacting with clients or diverse students is an indicator of the quality of social skills.

If viewed in terms of the working environment, the average schools counselor in primary schools have to deal with children, and schools counselor in secondary schools are faced with students who range from teenagers and young adults. The difference in the psychological development of the two groups have an impact on the needs of different social skills approach. Schools counselor in secondary schools should be more

optimistic and creative in their approach while interacting with young students who entering adulthood.

This finding raises a number of questions that include: How would the awareness and maturity gained by schools counselor influence their appreciation of universal human values (eg: self-control, self-motivation and social interaction with other people)? Are the spiritual values from previous education merely cognitive knowledge (spiritual awareness)? Have the challenges of living and working environments been plaguing the universal human values? Honest self-assessment should be done by every counselling teacher on spiritual commitment and maturity in life. As role models, schools counselor need to consciously apply spiritual values in their personal and working life.

The appreciation of the spiritual essence and maturity is intended to be emulated by clients and the community at large. The success in embracing these values will not only help reduce the schools counselor' value-conflict, but also contribute to a harmonious and competitive working environment. Accordingly, efforts to elevate the professionalism of schools counselor will continue to rise. Efforts in developing competence, motivation and social skills can be done through participation in social activities. Such activities encourage closer interaction with community members of all backgrounds (Noriah, 2005). Serious involvement in community activities not only will build interpersonal skills, but also test schools counselor' enthusiasm and motivation in successfully collaborating in a program within a team.

The willingness to lead the a counselling program also helps schools counselor to assess the level of commitment, initiative, creativity, openness, and most importantly the ability to control emotions when dealing with various behaviours of the community members. This experience can enhance the integrity and credibility of schools counselor' professionalism in the society.

7. CONCLUSION

In general, the research shows that the primary and secondary schools schools counselor have a high level of emotional intelligence with moderate scores in certain domains. While

there is no significant difference between the emotional intelligence of the primary and secondary schools schools counselor, there is little difference in the priority domains between the two cohorts. These findings imply that every counselling teacher should build skills in all domains of emotional intelligence in order to prepare for a variety of situations involving students, which is becoming more challenging recently.

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