THE LINK OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TOWARDS AGRICULTURE EXTENSION AGENTS' JOB PERFORMANCE IN MALAYSIA: A STUDY IN AGRO-BASED INDUSTRIES.

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Abstract

Recent times the agriculture sector have play a significant role in addressing the global crises. This study explores the links of emotional intelligence (EI) towards job performance of agricultural extension agents in Malaysia Agro-based industries. Throughout this study, four (4) elements of EI (self-awareness, self-motivation, self-regulation, and relationship management) were tested. The method of the study is through a descriptive quantitative analysis research by using the Wong Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), which was constructed using the ability EI model. 448 of respondents from various agencies in Malaysia were involved and resulted a significant correlation between the EI elements and the agricultural extension agents' job performance through Pearson's Correlation analysis. In addition, self-regulation reported as the most influential elements affected job performance among the respondents through regression analysis. Future research should be done aggressively on how to integrate the development of EI into the various agricultural education instructional initiatives.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence; job performance; Agro-based industries; agriculture extension agent; food security.

1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a critical ability that enables people to successfully connect with others and manage their emotions, which promotes good and quick relationship development, especially in the workplace. Organizations must handle the shift to global competition successfully while enhancing employee performance. In order to enable the management and workers to deal with this complex shift, EI plays an essential part in job performance.

However, (Sabie et al., 2020) drew attention to how complex the concept is and how difficult it is to assess EI. According to (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018), high employee performance among respondents would be brought about by the case company's strong reputation, corporate policy,

and relatively higher compensation compared to other similar companies in the market, rather than by the application of multiple dimensions of HRM and high employee well-being. Future study, according to the researchers, should examine the connections between the relevant issues in various sector and industrial contexts.

There have been several studies on the link between EI and job performance, and it has a long history of research. Therefore, giving additional data from a single, main research may only be useful in a few limited circumstances. In the past, research on EI have offered overstated or, tragically, assertions about the importance of EI in the workplace that were not even supported by evidence (Paniotova et al., 2021). Due to the unique nature of study on workers, several of the primary studies were also done on small samples. As a result, EI has come in for heavy criticism as a crucial variable influencing job performance (Paniotova et al., 2021).

This study tries to test the idea that someone who is emotionally intelligent is capable of working as a team, leading to everyone they meet having better regard for them and appreciating one another (Hogan & Blickle, 2018). This is due to the fact that emotionally intelligent personnel are happier, more devoted to their work, and have a more positive outlook. These will encourage a conducive environment, leading to greater work performance (Miao et al., 2017).

According to (Rohit et al., 2017) extensionists must communicate with farmers and other agricultural stakeholders as part of their job. EI is essential for providing quality extension services (Rohit et al., 2017). Despite being relatively new, EI in agricultural extension has a big influence on how successfully extensionists do their duties (Rohit et al., 2017).

Recent times have seen the agriculture sector play a significant role in addressing the global crises, especially regarding the issue of food security (Zainal & Prakoso, 2019). Malaysia, whose agricultural production is barely 45% of the norm for high-income nations, really does not produce enough food to support its population and industry. In addition, extension agents must be proficient in all areas to ensure that the agricultural industry can grow more competitive (Arif Shah et al., 2020) which is in response to the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry's five-way appeal, which prioritises and strategizes for 2019 to 2020.

By identifying the factors that affect job performance and closing gap of EI, the study aims to resolve the issue. The key subjects will be self-awareness, self-motivation, self-regulation, and relationship management, which are the four EI elements. This study will examine the connection between EI and the job performance of agricultural extension agents in an effort to fill the gap on how EI reflects job performance.

2. Objective of Study

1. To investigate the extent on agriculture extension agents' job performance in Malaysia Agro-based industries.

2. To examine the effect of emotional intelligence elements (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation and relationship management) towards agriculture extension agents' job performance in Malaysia Agro-based industries.

3. To study the most influential factor links to the EI elements (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation and relationship management) that contributed to agriculture extension agents' job performance in Malaysia Agro-based industries.

3. Hypothesis of Study

H1 There is significant impact of emotional intelligence elements and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

H2 There is significant relationship between emotional intelligence element (self-awareness) and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

H3 There is significant relationship between emotional intelligence element (self-motivation) and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

H4 There is significant relationship between emotional intelligence element (self-regulation) and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

H5 There is significant relationship between emotional intelligence element (relationship management) and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

4. Significance of the Study

In order to assure the growth of this region, the government is continuously seeking for fresh ideas to expand the agricultural sector and gro-based companies (Shah et al., 2013). In particular, Malaysia's food security has recently drawn significant attention from both the media and the public (EPU, 2021; Kuen, 2022).

For this reason, agricultural extension agents play the most important roles in agro-based companies. According to (Shah et al., 2013) an extension agent, for instance, seeks to get individuals to acknowledge and care about their concerns. The first stage is to solve these issues, educate others how to do it, and convince them to put what they have learned into practise so that they may finally feel content and proud of their achievements. Second, a change agent is a person whose main responsibility it is to change societal structures, attitudes, and behaviours. Additionally, change agents serve as a bridge between the populace and the government. In addition, a change agent is a person who starts a change process after seeing that certain adjustments are necessary for rural culture. Therefore, one of the key factors affecting Malaysia's agriculture industry's performance is the competency of extension agents, who play a particularly crucial role as change agents.

Furthermore, this research has value since it offers suggestions and rewards for public sector decision-makers and administrators, particularly in agro-based businesses, to help them get ready

and make progress towards keeping their extension agents. In Malaysia, ensuring food security overnight become a concern for both government and opposition lawmakers (Kuen, 2022).

The findings of this study will thus enable the responsible authority figure to offer further information or guidance about how to train the extension agents. Additionally, the extensionist will play a crucial role in aiding farmers in putting the policies into practise to make sure the strategy is successful.

As a consequence, the findings of this study will contribute to the development and implementation of the best strategy to address the problem in Agro-based sectors in the future. As of now, Malaysia has taken the lead with its 12th Plan (2021-2025) and National Food Security Policy Action Plan (2021-2025), both of which comprise a focused action plan for enhancing national food security (EPU, 2021). In such situation, issues and roadblocks encountered along the whole food supply chain from agricultural production to food waste are taken into consideration.

5. Literature Review

According to (Syngenta, 2022) the advising services in agriculture are also known as agricultural extension agents. According to numerous studies (Birkhaeuser, Dean, Robert E Evenson & Feder, 1991; Davis, 2008; Waddington, Hugh, 2014) agricultural extension can play a significant role in assisting farmers in overcoming informational hurdles and encouraging the utilisation of modern agricultural technologies.

Additionally, farmers are unable to significantly change their farming methods on their own. As a result, they need outside help, either directly in the form of business coaching and mentoring or indirectly in the form of intensives that might persuade farmers to embrace new ideas and take changes into consideration (Marlianti, Sumardjo, Pang S.Asngari, 2008). A branch of the government bureaucracy that directly interacts with farmers is agricultural extension (Zainal & Prakoso, 2019). Due to the direct accountability of extension agents to the general public, the effectiveness of an extension organisation depends on its ability to create, manage, and evaluate extension programmes (Rohit et al., 2017). It is common knowledge that a person's capacity for extension activities depends on their employment capacities.

Besides, extension agents work with a wide range of complicated and different personalities and backgrounds both in the field and in administration (Rohit et al., 2017). This is due to the significant role agricultural agents (Victor & A, 2019) have in the agricultural industry. They operate as a liaison between farmers and researchers as well as facilitators and communicators, assisting farmers in making decisions.

Globally, agriculture continues to play a significant role in South Asia's economy. According to (Suvedi & Sasidhar, 2020) more over 60% of the labour force is employed in small-scale agriculture, which has historically characterised the region. Developing agriculture is the primary method for decreasing hunger and poverty. Small-scale agriculture has recently been confronted with a number of complex issues, including the growth of commercial farming, trade liberalisation,

feminization of agricultural labour, and technological advancement whereby these issues have created both opportunities and risks for smallholder livelihoods (Suvedi & Sasidhar, 2020).

In Malaysia, the Department of Agriculture was established in 1905 (DOA, 2022). At the time, implementing the government's agricultural policy was the Department of Agriculture's main duty. With the founding of the Federal Agricultural Marketing Board (FAMA) (1965), the Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI) (1970), and the Board of Farmers' Organisations (LPP) (1973), the Department of Agriculture was reorganised and began focusing its mission to provide development services, particularly to farmers (DOA, 2022). By transferring technology based on Good Agricultural Practises along the value chain, the agencies are required to provide agricultural development and expansion services in order to increase productivity and income while ensuring the availability of enough, high-quality, and safe food (DOA, 2022).

Additionally, the extension agents were highlighted in Malaysia's 12th Plan, which aims to increase worker competencies so that all economic sectors may move up the value chain (EPU, 2021). It mentioned that the training curriculum and modules will be assessed in the agriculture industry in order to produce highly skilled and competent agriculturists who can meet both the current and future demand. The status, reputation, and recognition of the agricultural workforce may all be improved by the establishment of a professional organisation that would recognise knowledgeable and skilled farmers, farm specialists, agricultural technicians, and scientists as expert agriculturists (EPU, 2021).

5.1 Emotional intelligence

According to (Goleman, 1998) EI is a set of abilities that include self-awareness, self-motivation, self-regulation, and relationship management. The following is the element of EI that been measured in this study.

5.2 Self-awareness

According to (Goleman, 1998; Taher Roshandel Arbatani, 2012) self-awareness is the ability to detect, track, and describe an emotion as it develops. It might be an openness to candid criticism and a truthful self-evaluation. Self-awareness is one of the EI elements that has contributed to job success. Besides, as according to (Șișcanu, 2019) developing EI has a tendency to enhance knowledge as well as self-control which will helps towards comprehending other people's feelings and thoughts, sentiments, actions, motivations, and consequently lasting connections emerge with them wherever they go. The above is explained by a person's typical predisposition of focusing on their particular social systems, internal interactions, and relationships among others.

5.3 Self-motivation

Self-motivation may be summed up as the capacity to maintain optimism and a positive outlook in the face of difficulty and failure (Goleman, 1998; Taher Roshandel Arbatani, 2012). It is where commitment, enthusiasm, and accomplishment orientation will be tested. Employees' job

performance has also been impacted by self-motivation. This may encompass a combination of internal sentiments and beliefs, which include ambition and excitement for work, that impact employees, pushing them to expend more or less effort to finish the task (Bhatnagar, A., Gupta, S., Alonge, O., and George, 2017).

5.4 Self-regulation

Self-regulation is the capacity to successfully control unpleasant emotions (Goleman, 1998). This has brought to an understanding that those who are deemed competent at regulating their own emotions and managing the emotions of those around them will be having a high interpersonal skills and they are less likely to argue with others . These actions can therefore be viewed as examples of self-regulation because they were voluntary and unforced (Wolmarans, S., & Martins, 2001).

5.5 Relationship management

According to (Goleman, 1998) relationship management may be seen in one's capacity to build rapport, manage connections, and can create networks. From there, the skills of leadership, teamwork, and conflict resolution will be understood. In addition, relationship management is also can be seen as a relational competence necessary for each individual to maintain relationships with others. That is where the social talents can relate to the ability to manage one's own and other people's emotions while they can also maintain their connections. Therefore, it can turn out to the management talents aided in increasing productivity and quality performance in order to achieve common objectives (Shabeeba Km, 2019).

6. The application of Emotional Intelligence Ability Model

The ability-based approach to EI was initially introduced by (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The ability model identified EI as the capacity to effectively evaluate, interpret, and express emotions. It is the ability to interpret emotion and gather emotional knowledge in order to improve both intellectual and emotional development (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In the long run, EI theories have been implemented in a multitude of fields, including agro-based (Rohit et al., 2017; Thakur & Sharma, 2019) which means it is of the utmost importance to explore them in diverse sectors (Nguyen et al., 2019).

In order for the study to come out with the comprehensive result, "The Ability-based Approach" is chosen to be implemented. This is due to the best explanation for EI is provided by this model, which seeks to explain instances of EI by concentrating on its purest form, emphasizing emotion control, and eliminating personality factors.

7. Methodology

This study's test design was carried out in accordance with the Wong Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), which was constructed using the ability EI model (Wong, C.S., Law, K.S., & Wong, 2004). An updated WLEIS cascade model, in which emotion control follows both

SEA and OEA, has a favourable influence on EI while also revealing a strong correlation between four important components of EI and the aforementioned job performance (Nguyen et al., 2019).

A normal quantitative method was used through closed-ended questionnaire surveys whereby a simple descriptive analysis, Pearson's Correlation analysis and Regression analysis were performed.. The magnitude of each variable will be measured by the researcher using a Likert-Scale. Rensis Likert invented this in 1932. The scale was divided into four options: 1) = Strongly Disagree, 2) = Disagree, 3) = Neutral, 4) =Agree and 5) =Strongly Agree. The questionnaire was divided into two (2) sections which are the demographic profile (Section A) and variables examined (job performance (dependent variable) and the elements of EI (self-awareness, self-motivation, self-regulation and relationship management (independent variables))

The Stratified Random Sampling (SRS) was used to divide members of the populations within the overall population. 448 respondents were used in this study from four (4) agencies "Department of Agriculture (DOA), Lembaga Kemajuan Pertanian Muda (MADA), Lembaga Pemasaran Pertanian Persekutuan (FAMA), and Institut Penyelidikan dan Kemajuan Pertanian Malaysia (MARDI)", Kedah's branch, Malaysia.

8. Result and Discussion

The demographic profile for this study (Table 1) shows that 448 of respondents were participated consisted from 53.1% of male and 46.9% of female. All of the repondents were all Malay. Besides, the respondents mostly lies from 35 years old and above about 38.8% while the rest 30-34 years old (40.6%), 25-29 years old (17.6%) and the least group of 2.9% of 20-24 years. Moreover, the respondents consisted of 29.9% from MADA, 23.7% from MARDI and 23.2% from both FAMA and DOA, Kedah's branch, Malaysia.

Table 1. Respondents Profile

Items	Frequency (Percent)
Gender	
Male	53.1
Female	46.9
Ethnicity	
Malay	100
Age (years old)	
20-24	2.9
25-29	17.6
30-34	40.6
35 and above	38.8
Agencies	

MADA	29.9
MARDI	23.7
FAMA	23.2
DOA	23.2

Objective 1: To investigate the extent on agriculture extension agents' job performance in Malaysia Agro-based industries.

The first objective of this study was examined to what the extent on agriculture extension agents' job performance in Malaysia Agro-based industries. As reported (Table 2), most of the respondents indicated a moderate level of job performance of agriculture extension agents' in Malaysia Agro-based industries. It was resulted the minimum and maximum value at seven (7) and 25 respectively while its mean recorded at 16.7388 and the standard deviation recorded at 4.80689.

Table 2. Result of the extent on agriculture extension agents' job performance in Malaysia Agro-based industries.

Variable	Mean	Maximum	Minimum	Std. Dev	Decision
Job performance of agricultural extension agents in Malaysia Agro-based industries	16.7388	25.00	7.00	4.8069	Moderate

Objective 2: To examine the effect of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation and relationship management) towards agriculture extension agents' job performance in Malaysia Agro-based industries.

H1 There is significant relationship between emotional intelligence element (self-awareness) and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

Table 3 explained the relationship between EI element of self-awareness and agriculture extension agents' job performance. From the table below, it can be found that there is a moderate and significant relationship between EI element of self-awareness as the $r=0.388$, $p=0.001$, $p<0.05$. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted that there is a positive correlation between them. The importance of self-awareness has been discussed in earlier research. For a good reason leaders who have self-awareness may alter their behaviour to accommodate subordinate requests in which would enhance their overall effectiveness as a leader in the organization (Bratton, V. K., Dodd, N. G., & Brown, 2011).

Table 3. Result of correlation analysis between self-awareness and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

Variable	r-value	p-value	Decision
Self-awareness	0.388	0.001 p<0.05	H1 is accepted

H2 There is significant relationship between emotional intelligence element (self-motivation) and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

Furthermore, Table 4 explained the relationship between EI element of self-motivation and agriculture extension agents' job performance. The study of determining the significant relationship between EI element of self-motivation was found a high degree and positive correlation. It is where the r=0.552, p=0.001, p<0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. Previous study has indicated that an additional essential of subcompetencies needed to succeed in the employement whereby as stated by extension agents the inclusion of stress management, strong work and personal ethics, self-motivation and self-direction, and integrity is needed (Lakai et al., 2014).

Table 4. Result of correlation analysis between self-motivation and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

Variable	r-value	p-value	Decision
Self-motivation	0.552	0.001 p<0.05	H1 is accepted

H3 There is significant relationship between emotional intelligence element (self-regulation) and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

In addition, Table 5 explained the relationship between EI element of self-regulation and agriculture extension agents' job performance. The result also indicated a high degree and positive relationship between EI element of self-regulation and agriculture extension agents' job performance on regard of its r value resulted of r=0.762, p=0.001, p<0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. Previously, According to (Alferaih, 2017) understanding emotions entirely regulates the relationship between emotional perception along with regulation. It entails an accommodating strategy to managing behaviour without implicit direction or encouragement with the aim to accomplish a goal.

Table 5. Result of correlation analysis between self-regulation and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

Variable	r-value	p-value	Decision

| Self-regulation | 0.762 | 0.001 p<0.05 | H1 is accepted |

H5 There is significant relationship between emotional intelligence element (relationship management) and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

In addition, Table 6 explained the relationship between EI element of self-motivation and agriculture extension agents' job performance. In the study of examining the significant relationship between EI element of relationship management and agriculture extension agents' job performance, there is a low and positive correlation between them. It is where the r value resulted r=0.291, p=0.001, p<0.05 Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. According to (Rohit et al., 2017) EI is crucial for the delivery of successful and efficient extension services, particularly relationship management. In sum, this statement strengthened the validity of this study.

Table 6. Result of correlation analysis between relationship management and agriculture extension agents' job performance.

Variable	r-value	p-value	Decision
Relationship management	0.291	0.001 p<0.05	H1 is accepted

Objective 3: To study the most influential factor link to the emotional intelligence elements (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation and relationship management) that contributed to agriculture extension agents' job performance in Malaysia Agro-based industries.

This study is attempted to determining what are the most influential factor link to the EI elements of self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation and relationship management that contributed to agriculture extension agents' job performance in Malaysia Agro-based industries. From the examination, all of the independents cariables were able to clarify og 58.8% of the variance (R square). Morever, the third objective of the study resulted as the self-regulation is the most influential elements that affected toward agriculture extension agents' job performance β=0.747, p=0.001, p<0.05.

Table 7. Summary result of regression analysis.

Variables	Standardized Beta	t-value	p-value	R square
Self-awareness	0.013	0.252		
Self-motivation	-0.016	-0.254	0.001 P<0.05	0.585
Self-regulation	0.747	16.911		
Relationship management	0.70	2.025		

9. Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on statistical analysis, it was discovered that the EI variables had a favourable impact on how well agricultural expansions performed. Based on observations and personal experience, EI is currently a highly important skill for an agricultural extension to possess given the rigours of the work in this industry.

This study received 448 of respondents. It consisted of 29.9% from MADA, 23.7% from MARDI and 23.2% from both FAMA and DOA, Kedah's branch, Malaysia. From this study, it proved that the EI elements (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation and relationship management) has a positive significant towards agriculture extension agents' job performance. Among all of the elements, self-regulation tended to be the most influential factors that affected to the job performance of the extension agents.

Nonetheless, the exam was designed as a self-reported questionnaire, which may not be adequate to measure aptitude due to social desirability bias. In the case of failure, respondents may overestimate their intended potential and place blame elsewhere rather than on their incapacity.

Meanwhile, the ability of extension agents in Malaysia is an essential element for achievement for the agricultural sector in Malaysia, particularly as the agents of change. Roles as change agents are built upon the abilities that individuals and groups will need at some point to be effective, and they are utilized to make human resource choices. In order to be an outstanding extension agent, they must possess the knowledge, technical abilities, and personal attributes that result in exceptional performance.

In sum, in order for the extension agents to succeed in the globalization era, more study is required to uncover the fundamental skills they must possess. Multiple investigations on extension agents' proficiency with various techniques and views across agencies that affect work performance must be done. According to the findings of this study, more research should be done on how to integrate the development of EI into the various agricultural education instructional initiatives. Research on EI and leadership should be done as well, with an eye towards enhancing leadership development initiatives.

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