

Effect of Perceived Social Support on Emotional Intelligence of Malaysian Service Sector Employees

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to ascertain how emotional intelligence, made up of personal and social competence, is affected by perceived social support. The sources of perceived social support are loved ones, close friends, and significant others. Emotional intelligence enables people to control their emotional energy to support those around them. Service sector employees are targeted as they deal with the effects of the recent pandemic. PLS-SEM was used to analyse 536 responses. Personal and social competencies were impacted by perceived social support. Surprisingly, personal competency was more strongly impacted. For various other economic sectors, similar analyses can be conducted.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; perceived social support, personal competence, social competence

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1.0 Introduction

Study on emotional intelligence has been emphasised of late (Coetzee & Harry, 2014; Prentice et al., 2019; Sony & Mekoth, 2016). More importantly, emotional intelligence has been found to sufficiently explain various components of physical and mental health (Fernandez-Abascal & Martin-Diaz, 2015). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 1 in 4 people experiences mental illness at some point in their lives. In Malaysia, 1 in 3 citizens suffers from mental health problems. Studies show that the mental health of the population was especially affected during the pandemic, even students, due to the many unexpected changes (Irzan et al., 2022; Samuel et al., 2022). Due to the nature and impacts of the present worldwide pandemic, research on mental health and wellness has been elevated to the forefront, particularly since late 2019 (Mohd Samsuri Ghazali et al., 2020).. The obvious result of the pandemic, according to psychoanalysts, psychologists, and mental health professionals, is most likely to affect the mental health of a sizable portion of the global population, with an increasing tendency towards higher cases of suicide attempts, morbid depression, and attempts to harm oneself (Li et al., 2020; Moukaddam & Shah, 2020; Saberi Othman et al., 2016; Yao et al., 2020). Hence, a study on emotional intelligence would serve to enhance people's understanding of mental health and perhaps lead to reducing mental health issues.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive, interpret, demonstrate, control, and use emotions to communicate with and relate to others effectively and constructively. This ability to express and control emotions is essential, but so is the ability to understand, interpret, and respond to the emotions of others. In other words, emotional intelligence is a theoretical construct encompassing the ability to perceive, understand, and manage one's own (personal competence) and others' emotions (social competence) (Bardach et al., 2021). A high level of emotional intelligence can help form a deeper and more meaningful relationship with others, achieve a greater degree of success at work, and lead a more fulfilling and nurturing life (Elsherif & Elgafaar, 2021).

The first dimension of emotional intelligence, which is personal competence, involves being able to create a precise and realistic model of oneself and using it to be effective in life and work. Intra-personal intelligence is defined by "personal aptitude" and embraces various aptitudes that determine an individual's self-command: self-awareness (knowing one's own internal states, preferences, resources and intuitions); self-regulation (managing one's own internal states, impulses and resources); and self-motivation or work engagement (Gorgievski et al., 2010; Goleman, 1995). The second dimension of emotional intelligence, namely social competence, can be defined as a "social aptitude" for understanding others, motivating them and working cooperatively with them (Riggio & Reichard, 2008; Goleman, 1999). Inter-personal-emotional intelligence involves skills of effective communication, success in inter-personal relationships and helping others to act and respond in a smart and caring way (Decker et al., 2012; Weisinger, 1998). Individuals who struggle with social competence are more likely to experience difficulties in forming lasting and supportive relationships or may have poorer outcomes in mental health & wellbeing as adults. Individuals with better social competence achieve better career

success (Amdurer et al, 2014). It has been reported that emotional intelligence has positive outcomes such as a decrease in turnover intention (Gara Bach Ouerdian et al., 2021), an increase in organisational citizenship behaviours (Dogru, 2022), a higher level of organisational commitment (Alsughayir, 2021), as well as an increase in job performance (Pekaar et al., 2017). Empirically, some studies have argued that employees with a higher emotional intelligence perform better than employees with a lower emotional intelligence partly because they are more satisfied with their jobs, which results in improved performance (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016; Li et al., 2018). There are five domains that cover both the personal and social competences. They are self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social awareness, and social skills.

In brief, the five domains relate to knowing one's emotions; managing emotions; motivating oneself; recognizing and understanding other people's emotions; and managing relationships or managing the emotions of others (Serrat, 2017).

The expansion of the service sector of the economy is regarded from an Asian viewpoint because of digitalization and the development of innovative technology. From an economic perspective, it is believed that integration between the two is the key to ASEAN's success. The service sector in Malaysia is predicted to develop by 6.2% on an annual basis (y-o-y) in 2020, up from 6.1% in 2019 (Yong, Lim, & Ilankoon, 2019). According to this estimate, the Malaysian economy's service sector will increase at a rate that is the highest. The service sector dominated Malaysia's employment rate in 2019, accounting for 62% of the labour force.

Private education, telecommunications, finance, healthcare, insurance, lodging, restaurants, wholesale & retail, trade, and professional & business services are a few sub-sectors that make up Malaysia's service sector (SME (Small Medium Enterprise) Corporation Malaysia, 2019). It is crucial to support the service industry to continue job growth because the service sector is significantly more dominant than other economic sectors (Noland, Park & Estrada, 2020).

The service sector needs employees with high emotional intelligence as this sector is often fraught with interpersonal friction and conflict. In service sector jobs, having high emotional intelligence positively affects task performance when dealing with customers. The need for a degree of emotional intelligence on the employees in the services sector cannot be overemphasized. This need gets accentuated during times of crisis when there is higher attendant tension and stress (Sinha, 2016). Human interaction in service industries is an important dimension that leads to superior customer experience. It differentiates service providers in an industry. Changing business environment creates pressure on the organizations to focus upon the quality of the customer experience to maintain competitive positioning.

As emotional intelligence focuses on emotions acting within oneself when dealing and interacting with people surrounding oneself, this study focuses on how social support affects emotional intelligence. Perceived social support refers to how individuals perceive friends, family members and others as sources available to provide material, psychological and overall support during times of need. Social support is the broader concept constituting

both the individual's wider social structure and the precise functions the individual serves in his/her varied interpersonal relationships (Grey et al., 2018). Social support is the perception of being cared for by others and having a reliable network to turn to when needed, in everyday situations or specific moments of crisis (Taylor, 2011). It can be perceived from three sources: family, friends, and significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). Social support is also referred to as the frequency of support actions that are provided by others (Santini et al., 2015); which is why, it can be understood as the subjective feeling of being supported. Additionally, the type of support can be (1) emotional, (2) instrumental, (3) evaluative, and (4) informative (Sarason et al., 1990). Since the theory of self-determination, the need to belong to a group is relevant for healthy psychological development and human flourishing (Ryan & Deci, 2000); however, little has been studied about the effects of perceived social support over time (Cobo-Rendon et al., 2020).

There is a need to study how perceived social support affects emotional intelligence as emotional intelligence is really needed to survive the challenges and the constant change faced globally. If personal and social competences can be improved through social support, that would be an area to focus on to help individuals' overall enhancement of emotional intelligence. To reiterate, this study focuses on how the sense of perceived social support impacts the emotional intelligence among service sector employees.

2.0 Literature Review

Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to perceive emotions correctly, to understand, evaluate and move forward, use emotions to facilitate thinking and manage emotions effectively, to promote intellectual and emotional growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotional Intelligence is of paramount importance as it relates to emotions and feelings which equates with the positive outcome of work. In the rapidly changing global economy era, organizations function to gain competitive advantage, often with increased expectations, high speed, high efficiency, remarkable effectiveness, high job performance, and high organizational commitment. These fast-track processes however leave employees stressed and disengaged (Saharia et al., 2013).

2.1 Emotional Intelligence

According to studies conducted in the workplace (Brackett et al., 2011; Cherniss, 2010; O'Boyle et al., 2011; Schlaerth et al., 2013), emotional intelligence differs from person to person. Adaptive emotional functioning is defined and operationalized by emotional intelligence. Most operationalizations of emotional intelligence refer to perception, understanding, and effectively managing one's own and others' emotions as fundamental talents (Bar-On, 2000; Mayer et al., 2008).

More positive intrapersonal outcomes in general are linked to higher levels of emotional intelligence (Schutte & Malouff, 2013). These results include improved mental health and increased subjective well-being as measured by indices like life satisfaction and positive affect (Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Martins et al., 2010). Greater levels of emotional

intelligence are also linked to a range of interpersonal outcomes, such as more cooperative behaviour, stronger interpersonal connections, and higher relationship satisfaction (Malouff et al., 2014). Those who have higher emotional intelligence frequently perceive having more social support and are happier with it. Similarly, employees with higher emotional intelligence are capable of building more social capital (Chun et al., 2010), with higher levels of perceived social support.

More emotionally intelligent employees perform better at work, according to meta-analyses that compile the findings of numerous studies (O'Boyle et al., 2011), and they particularly excel at high-emotional labour tasks (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Moreover, meta-analytic findings demonstrate that more emotionally intelligent workers typically exhibit superior leadership, including more productive conflict management (Schlaerth et al., 2013).

In this paper, emotional intelligence is measured by the various domains of the personal and social competencies, giving due importance to one's own ability to manage one's emotions and to deal with the emotions of people in their social/work circles (Van Oosten et al., 2019). Personal competence is the inherent ability to recognize one's own internal biases, what instances trigger the various emotional responses from within and how best to address and appropriately handle these trigger mechanisms in a profoundly professional way and setting, such as with a customer or another colleague. Social competence capabilities are usually applied to and reflect the range of behaviours needed for the due enhancement of work-related performance (Franco et al., 2017). Both are equally important for the behavioural enhancement of one's role in the workplace (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2019).

Emotional intelligence is typically divided into personal intelligence and social intelligence in the models that are now in use. Understanding and controlling one's own (personal) and other people's emotions (social) is described as having emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Comparably, Bar-On's model of emotional intelligence featured social and intrapersonal (personal) dimensions (Bar-On, 1997). On the other hand, Goleman's (2001) revised mixed model placed an emphasis on social awareness and relationship management as well as inner self-awareness and self-control (social). Petrides and Furnham (2003) also concurred that processing affect-stacked information intra-personally (personal) and interpersonally (social) is the key to developing emotional intelligence.

In the most generic framework of emotional intelligence, five domains cover together personal (self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation) and social (social awareness and social skills) competences. Self-Awareness includes emotional awareness (recognizing one's emotions and their effects), accurate self-assessment (knowing one's strengths and limits), and self-confidence (sureness about one's self-worth and capabilities). Second, Self-Regulation which includes self-control (managing disruptive emotions and impulses), trustworthiness (maintaining standards of honesty and integrity), conscientiousness (taking responsibility for personal performance), adaptability (flexibility in handling change), and innovativeness (being comfortable with and open to novel ideas and current information). Next, Self-Motivation which consists of achievement drive (striving

to improve or meet a standard of excellence), commitment (aligning with the goals of the group or organization), initiative (readiness to act on opportunities), optimism (persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks).

Social competence has two domains: social awareness and social skills. Social Awareness is made up of empathy (sensing others' feelings and perspective, and taking an active interest in their concerns), service orientation (anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers' needs), developing others (sensing what others need to develop, and bolstering their abilities), leveraging diversity (cultivating opportunities through diverse people), and political awareness (reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships). The second domain, Social Skills consists of influence (wielding effective tactics for persuasion), communication (sending clear and convincing messages), leadership (inspiring and guiding groups and people), change catalyst (initiating or managing change), conflict management (negotiating and resolving disagreements), building bonds (nurturing instrumental relationships), collaboration and cooperation (working with others toward shared goals), and team capabilities (creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals).

2.2 Perceived Social Support

The term "perceived social support" describes how people view their friends, family members, and other people as sources of practical, emotional, and all-around help when they are in need. Because perceived levels of caring, love, and support can lead to satisfying experiences, perceived social support has repeatedly been linked to wellbeing (e.g., Siedlecki et al., 2014). Higher levels of perceived social support are linked to improved results for both physical and mental health. Social support can be emotional, instrumental, financial, or informational (Reevyl & Maslach, 2001). Emotional support relates to demonstrating empathy, caring or concern while instrumental support focuses on concrete assistance to help others accomplish tasks. Financial support relates to monetary support and informational support provides concrete assistance to help others accomplish tasks. The frequency of interaction with family, friends, spouses, or partners, the level of affinity in providing and receiving support, supporting roles, and subjective life satisfaction are just a few examples of the many variables that make up the multifaceted concept of social support. (Lubben et al., 2001).

Though there is a dearth of studies on social support and emotional intelligence, researchers have studies on social support and other areas of well-being. Khatiwada et al. (2021) found social support to positively affect psychological well-being, negatively correlated with psychological distress, and positively correlated with satisfaction. Similarly, Cobo-Rendon et al. (2020) found students at universities experience more eudemonic wellbeing when their perception of social support is improved. Students' perception of support at the start of their university careers is positive for their general wellbeing, which contributes towards their mental health. Adolescents who experience higher social support are likely to have higher self-esteem and are more likely to have better psychological well-being (Poudel et al., 2020).

2.3 Development of Framework

Based on the review on emotional intelligence (dependent variable) and perceived social support (independent variable), the theoretical framework is developed. Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive one's emotion and the emotion of those around and use these emotions to bring about positive values. This study hopes to determine if perceived social support would lead to an enhancement of emotional intelligence. Studies have shown that when an individual perceives social support positively, the well-being of the individual is improved. As mental, physical, and psychological well-being is related to emotional intelligence, hence a positive relationship is hypothesized between perceived social support and emotional intelligence. Figure 1 depicts the proposed framework. Emotional intelligence consists of five domains which are divided into 2 constructs, namely personal and social competence. Perceived Social Support measures the support received from family, friends and significant other.

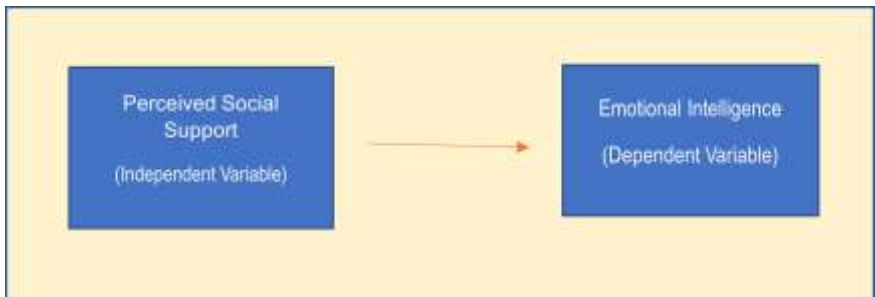


Figure 1: Proposed Framework
(Lakey & Orehek, 2011)

The proposed hypotheses are:

H1: There is a positive relationship between perceived social support and personal competence.

H2: There is a positive relationship between perceived social support and social competence.

3.0 Methodology

In this section, the process of sampling, data collection and research instrument is discussed.

3.1 Data collection tools and methods

Data was collected using the online platforms where the questionnaire link was shared on Facebook and LinkedIn. Several questions, relating to the work sector of the respondents were required questions before the questionnaire could be assessed. This was to ensure that the respondents were from the service sector. Enumerators were also hired to obtain more respondents. They were given a detailed explanation of the requirements for the study

to ensure that data was obtained only from service sector employees. McCauley, et al. (2020), noted that the presence of enumerators tends to be more conspicuous than researchers. The enumerators are directly involved within the service sector (executives & above). Their direct employment in the service sector allows better networking and collection of data. Prior to the administration of the questionnaires, a pilot study on 30 respondents was conducted. The pilot study proved that respondents were proficient in English and able to understand the questionnaire items. The researcher's identity was revealed on the front cover, especially the name of the institution to which the researcher belongs, the objectives of the research and the confidentiality of the responses. It was emphasized that the respondents were not forced or threatened to answer the questionnaire. They could proceed with the questionnaire when they duly consented to do so. The entire process of data collection was for a period of 3 months.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population was focused on all service sector employees in Malaysia. There was no specific industries or specific positions of respondents as requirements. The current study refers to the population as all the employees within the service industry in Malaysia, which was forecasted to reach a total of 9.3 million in 2020 (Department of Statistics, 2017). The statistical test for linear multiple regression R^2 for a medium-sized effect with at least 95% chance of detecting a small moderation effect estimated 103 samples for this study as calculated by G.Power. This total number of samples is the minimum sample needed to achieve adequate effect under different conditions in linear regression (Gefen & Rigdon, 2011). In terms of sampling technique, this study uses the judgement sampling, or purposive sampling which involves the researcher choosing sampling units based on existing scientific knowledge or the researcher's professional judgement. In other words, this technique relies on the responses from a group of experts with knowledge on the area of research, in this case, employees from the service sector (Kumar & Bhagwat, 2010).

3.3 Measurement Tools

The first section of the questionnaire were nominal scale questions which were used to obtain the background information of the respondents such as gender, age group and place of residence. The rest of the questionnaire was predicated on two main scales, namely the Self-Assessment Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (Goleman, 1998) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988; Di Fabio & Busoni, 2008).

The Self-Assessment Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire consists of forty-three (43) items in total. The items were used to obtain responses regarding all the five domains of emotional intelligence. For personal competence, 11 items measured self-awareness, 17 items measured self-regulation and self-motivation was measured using 15 items. Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation are the domains of personal competence. Eighteen items measured social awareness and social skills were measured using 32 items. Social awareness and social skills are integral domains of social competence.

To get a better insight into the measurement scale, some examples are included: self-awareness (e.g., I recognize how my feelings affect my performance), self-regulation (e.g., I take tough, principled stands even if they are unpopular), self-motivation (e.g., I am persistent in seeking goals despite obstacles and setbacks), social awareness (e.g., I show sensitivity and understand others' perspectives) and social skills (e.g., I try to understand diverse worldviews and be sensitive to group differences). All the items were Likert-scale items, where the scores ranged from 1 (underdeveloped) to 5 (excellent).

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support consists of 12 self-reporting items which focused on individual's perception of the notion of social support coming from their own subjective experiences and events in their private lives with the ability to use and apply them in support of finding solutions to the problems and circumstances that surfaces in their day-to-day stressful events. This questionnaire is widely used in studies where perceived social support is studied. The items measured the support obtained from family, friends and significant other (4 items each). The 12 items were scored using the 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very Strongly disagree) to 7 (Very strongly Agree).

3.4 Ethical considerations

The questionnaire was only made available to the respondents after being examined for procedural and substantive propriety and receiving the necessary written clearance from the UiTM Ethics Committee, as required by the institution.

4.0 Results

The analysis for this study was based on two hypotheses as stated below:

H1: There is a positive relationship between perceived social support and personal competence.

H2: There is a positive relationship between perceived social support and social competence.

4.1 Profile of Respondents

The number of responses that could be analysed totalled 536. In terms of gender, 70% (375) were females. In terms of education, a substantial proportion (73%) were either Diploma (38%) or Degree holders (35%). In terms of ethnicity, the respondents reflected the racial composition of Malaysia, with 36.4% Malays, 30% Chinese and 25.9% Indians. More of the respondents were from the private sector service industries (68.5%), while the remaining were from the public service sectors. The respondents were aged between 20-40 years (60%).

4.2 Testing of Hypotheses

Using SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) version 26, the data was first cleaned and inspected. Data were gathered using single-source data, hence the "full collinearity" test recommended by Kock (2015) was effectively used to address the issue

of common method bias. If the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values are less than 3.3, it is considered that the common method bias is not a severe concern. To perform this test, a random variable was first constructed, and all the other variables were then simultaneously regressed against it. The fact that all the VIF values were found to be below 3.3 shows that the common technique bias is not a significant threat to the study's reliability. SmartPLS 3.3.3 (Ringle et al., 2015) was next used to test the validity, reliability, and the developed hypotheses. As there were multiple hierarchical component measures, this second-generation robust structural equation modelling software is suitable to be used to run simultaneous tests (Hair et al., 2021).

4.3 Measurement Model

As there were several hierarchical component models, the first order dimensions were assessed before assessing the higher order constructs (Table 1). Composite reliability could be defined similarly to Cronbach alpha (Henseler et al., 2009). Composite reliability values ranging from 0.6 to 0.7 in an exploratory study is considered satisfactory. However, in advanced research the satisfactory values of composite reliability ranges from 0.7 to 0.9 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). There are two subsets of validity to be assessed, namely convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010; Henseler et al., 2009). Convergent validity could be referred to as the latitude of which multiple items measuring similar constructs, shares a high proportion of variance in common (Hair et al., 2010). The average variance extracted (AVE) will be used to assess the convergent validity. The benchmark for a sufficient convergent validity is placed at an AVE value of at least 0.5. The other subset, the discriminant validity is assessed to investigate whether a pair of conceptually different concept would display enough difference between them (Henseler et al., 2009). To test the discriminant validity, the HTMT ratio was used (Henseler et al., 2015). Franke and Sarstedt (2019) suggested that if the HTMT ratios are lower than 0.85 or 0.90, then there is no problem with discriminant validity. The results showed the average variance extracted (AVE) was all found to be above 0.5, and composite reliability (CR) was recorded above 0.7; thus, the suitability of the convergent validity and the reliability of our measures were duly confirmed (Hair et al., 2021; Ramayah et al., 2018).

Table 1 Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness, Kurtosis, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance (AVE) Extracted Second Order Variables

Variables	Mean	Std Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness	CR	AVE
Personal Competence	3.776	.644	-.055	-.022	.923	.753
Social Competence	3.789	.607	-.256	.223	.933	.691
Perceived Social Support	5.000	1.203	-.200	-.351	.893	.737

4.4 Structural Model

A bias corrected bootstrapping with a resample size of 5,000 was carried out to assess the hypotheses generated (Hair et al., 2021). For Personal Competence, the $R^2 = 0.806$ ($Q^2 = 0.421$) which shows that 80.6 of the variance in Personal Competence can be explained by Social Support (SS). For Social Competence, the $R^2 = 0.372$ ($Q^2 = 0.125$) which shows that 37.2% of the variance in Social Competence can be explained by Social Support (SS).

Table 2 Hypotheses Testing

Hypo	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Dev	t-value	p-value	BILL	BCIUL	f2
H1	Perceived Social Support --> Personal Competence	.518	.038	13.466	$p < 0.01$	0.449	0.577	0.367
H2	Perceived Social Support--> Social Competence	.432	.042	10.341	$p < 0.01$	0.356	0.493	0.229

Table 2 displays the results of the tested hypotheses. The relationship between Perceived Social Support --> Personal Competence ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$) hence it is positively related thus supporting H1 of our study. Perceived Social Support --> Social Competence ($\beta = 0.432$, $p < 0.01$) was positive and significant thus supporting H2 of our study.

5.0 Discussion

Two hypotheses were tested in this study. To reiterate, this study was conducted to determine if perceived social support has a relationship with emotional intelligence. However, since emotional intelligence is made up of two competences (with a total of 5 domains), the study tested the relationship separately for the two competences. This is the contribution of this study as this is something that is new in this field of research. Both the hypotheses were accepted which shows that perceived social support positively affected personal competence and social competence. However, the relationship with personal competence was stronger. This was unexpected as personal competence is intrapersonal, hence this competence can be enhanced through various means, including self-growth. Social competence, on the other hand, is interpersonal as it involves relating with people around, hence it is assumed that this competence would be enhanced through higher levels of social support. However, the findings did not support this assumption.

Personal competence is made up of 3 domains, namely self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation, while social competence is made up of the two domains of social awareness and social skills. There are several reasons for these findings. First, the respondents were younger (majority between the ages of 20-40). It would be more useful for younger employees to work on enhancing their personal competences before managing their social competence. Once they feel more confident with themselves and their abilities to manage their emotions, then they would be able to confidently deal with the emotions of

the people around them. The second reason could also be accepted as the limitation of those studies where employees, regardless of their positions in the service sector were accepted as respondents for this study. In terms of education, the respondents were diploma and degree holders, which could put them as middle management in the organization. Hence, they are not in positions where they need to control, give instructions or be role models for others in the organization. Hence, it would be more important for them to build themselves up and enhance their emotional intelligence for higher positions later in their career life.

The perceived social support from family, friends and significant other seems to give them the motivation and confidence to enhance their personal competence. Though this perceived support is found to affect social competence, this would only take place later in their career or after obtaining higher positions in the organizations.

6.0 Conclusion

The initiatives for digital transformation that have proliferated across every industry, particularly with COVID-19, have also changed how businesses view their workforce. It is feasible to say that employees' capacity to utilise and manage digital tools has become more important than their knowledge, skills, ability to manage emotions, communication ability, and compassionate thinking. Being able to apply, control, perceive, advance technical knowledge, and rule over digital business operations is necessary but insufficient. Emotional intelligence is as least as vital as digital intelligence given that employees must constantly be in communication and collaboration inside the businesses—whether they operate in a digital or physical environment (Yeke, 2023).

Young adults were shown to have misaligned perceptions of what employers and job candidates expect in terms of landing successful jobs. They recognised technical prowess and academic accomplishment as the primary determinants of successful employment, but they failed to recognise that employers also expected highly developed emotional intelligence to be demonstrated (Ashaye et al., 2022).

Social support was found to be a strong associative factor when one's cognitive functions are on the decline and when the person undergoes dementia (Morento et al., 2021). In our fast-embracing digitalized age, though, social support is not regarded as that pertinent as lives transform and become highly individualized, lessening the impact, effect and importance of community and family ties. This study, however, clearly indicates how social support is a necessary element for an individual to stay focused and on an even keel.

Emotional intelligence is a critical concept in successful employment because the traits of EI include the ability to self-access (self-awareness), the drive to achieve a specific goal (motivation), effective and excellent interaction and communication ability (social skills), self-management or self-regulation and the ability to understand the feelings of other (empathy).

Emotional intelligence becomes the essential differentiator in attaining excellence in individual engagement, product innovation, and customer experiences as AI and

automation replace regular mental and physical labour. To improve their relationships with both their employees and consumers, forward-thinking businesses are teaching their staff how to do this.

Emotional intelligence will be even more crucial as the rate of change frantically quickens and the responsibilities of the workplace place ever-increasing demands on a person's cognitive, emotional, and physical resources. It is undeniable that all the elements of emotional intelligence are extremely helpful in the job because both personal and social competence are required to provide a positive work environment. Nonetheless, this study demonstrates that people do develop a greater level of emotional intelligence when they believe they have the social support of their family, friends, and significant others..

This is an important result because it demonstrates the importance of connections and how emotional intelligence is impacted by social support levels. Emotional acuity as well as social support are linked to low levels of burnout in teachers (Fiorilli et al., 2019). Also, during Covid-19, social support and emotional intelligence were the two characteristics that reduced occupational stress (Valenti et al., 2021). So, putting a lot of effort into creating connections and relationships at work is crucial since doing so might improve emotional intelligence, which in turn affects worker productivity and efficiency. The pandemic that hampered networking and physical gatherings in recent years has hurt this element. Workplaces must put in place programs which help build social support among the employees to strengthen their emotional intelligence.

Future studies can examine these relationships in other work sectors. It would also be interesting to understand how the various domains of emotional intelligence are affected by varying levels of perceived social support.

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Article Contribution to Related Field of Study

This article has once again highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in the service sector in Malaysia. In addition, the article has highlighted the varying effect of perceived social support on personal and social competence, the two components of emotional intelligence. This finding contributes to enhance the understanding of the differences in the two components and how strategies must be put in place if the workplace has identified the need to enhance one of the components compared to the other. For leadership at workplaces, for example, greater emphasis must be put on enhancing the social competence of the employees.

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