Social and emotional self-efficacy of adolescents: measured and analysed interdependencies within and across academic achievement level

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ABSTRACT
The aim of the study was to measure self-efficacy of the adolescents from different academic achievement levels in Malaysia. A sample of 169 students was selected from different academic settings of Malaysia. Social and emotional self-efficacy of the adolescents comprises 16 items, adapted from the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children to assess the social and emotional self-efficacy of children. Data of the research were analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The data analysis indicated that there is a significant difference in emotional self-efficacy across academic ability. However, there is no significant difference in social self-efficacy across academic ability among adolescents. Furthermore, the research showed that there is no significant difference in social and emotional self-efficacy across gender. The study recommends the findings of the study to be used as a guideline in developing a psychological instrument in assessing social and emotional self-efficacy of the adolescents in Malaysian context.

Adolescence is an evolution era formed in between childhood and adulthood. At this period of time, adolescents experience enormous changes in the development of biological, emotional, social, cognitive and intellectual (Vera, Shin, Montgomery, Mildner & Speight, 2004). The dominant task involved during the adolescence period is the readiness to enter adulthood stage, which is believed to influence the prospects of any culture attachment in the future (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg & Verma, 2002).

Adolescence is the stage where the individual is expected to confront and adapt to the rigorous modification in terms of school, social and family life. Thus, at this stage of life, adolescents usually endure a fusillade of challenges. Adolescents who are also known as young adults face changes in various aspects of their lives (Schulenberg, Bryant & O’Malley, 2004). Besides, at this period of life, they are involved in the transition period to adulthood due to the comparison between the values held in childhood and the values learned throughout their growing phase (Özbay, 1997). Hence, adolescence is seen as the best time that illustrates higher level of exploration about own self (Jessor, Donovan & Costa, 1991) and at the same time initiates them in committing with more matured roles (Erikson, 1968). Therefore, it is essential for an individual to hold confidence in the ability to control one’s environment which is known as self-efficacy. At this stage, the task of upholding one’s confidence is believed to produce a fruitful outcome in terms of subjective well-being.
Adolescence is a crucial stage that experienced by every individual in terms of exploring their educational opportunities, career options and preparedness towards independent life. In adolescence, self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in coping with life situation.

The focus of this study was to assess the development of specific self-efficacy among Malaysian adolescents between the ages of 17 and 19, from different academic settings. The two main aspects of self-efficacy discussed in this journal are emotional self-efficacy and social self-efficacy. Emotional self-efficacy is believed to be one's ability to survive with negative emotions (Muris, 2001), whereas social self-efficacy tends to be referred to the capability of an individual to respond proficiently during interpersonal circumstances (Coleman, 2003).

**Self-efficacy**

Research shows that the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement is of high interest in the social science studies. Historical studies indicate that there is a strong link between self-efficacy and academic achievement. This is supported by Lent, Larkin and Brown (1986), who go further to say self-efficacy plays a role as a consistent predictor of an individual’s educational achievement. In exploring further on the studies of self-efficacy, Turner, Chandler and Heffer’s study (2009) concluded self-efficacy as an important predictor of an individual’s academic success. In a recent similar research by Salami (2010) which stated that students with high self-efficacy are believed to be positively motivated in academic activities and possess optimistic characteristics that drive towards successful tertiary education.

When it comes to self-efficacy and academic achievement including behaviours and attitudes, many studies (Faulkner & Reeves, 2009; Hagger, Chatzisarantis & Biddle, 2001; Schwarzer & Fuchs, 2009; Salami, 2004; Salami & Ogundokun, 2009; Yalcinalp, 2005) proved that there is a link between self-efficacy and these three aspects above.

Self-efficacy is seen as an essential element that contributes to an adolescent’s well-being. This is supported by Meyer and Kim (2000) which stated self-efficacy is a psychological mediator of health and academic accomplishment of the adolescents.

Although there are many studies demonstrating the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement, there are also studies that revealed contrast statements on this notion. A study that supported the above is by Strelnieks (2005), which concluded that influence of self-efficacy on the academic success of an individual relies on exterior elements such as gender and socio-economic status. Hence, self-efficacy can be a significant predictor of academic success in female population rather than the male population. Furthermore, the researcher also found that the self-efficacy acts as a predictor of academic achievement when it comes to individual from higher socio-economic status.

The overall studies of self-efficacy tend to point to the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement. However, in this research, the focus will be on self-efficacy, particularly related to academic achievers in these following groups: the low, average and high academic achievers in Malaysia. Therefore, in this social science research, self-efficacy will be a broad subject matter of discussion.

**Social and emotional self-efficacy**

Adolescence is a critical period where an individual is exposed to diverse of life experience. Hence, social self-efficacy is a protective component that enhances healthy development and social functioning during adolescence. In addition, social self-efficacy is believed to have great influences on psychological adjustment and mental well-being of an individual. To further elaborate on this statement, a research by Matsushima and Shiomi (2003) reported two types of outcomes and they are self-efficacy negatively correlated with interpersonal stress and positively correlated with interpersonal stress coping. Other studies also focused on investigating the relationship between self-efficacy and depression. In conjunction with this, recent studies stated that social self-efficacy has negative correlation with depression (Anderson & Betz, 2001; Bandura, 2002; Hermann & Betz, 2004, 2006; Smith & Betz, 2002). Furthermore, a previous study by Maciejewski, Prigerson and Mazure (2000) demonstrated self-efficacy as an intermediary of the association between stressful life events and depressive symptoms.

Social self-efficacy is an essential key aspect in possible correlation to social behaviour. The adolescent
with high social self-efficacy is believed to experience less social phobia that leads to productive social functioning. Similarly, Muris (2002) reported in his research that self-efficacy of adolescents is negatively correlated to social phobia. The influence of self-efficacy on social behaviour in previous studies has reliably verified that social self-efficacy positively correlated to self-esteem (Caprara & Steca, 2005; Connolly, 1989; Hermann & Betz, 2004, 2006; Smith & Betz, 2000, 2002), social confidence (Anderson & Betz, 2001; Fan & Mak, 1998; Matsushima & Shiomi, 2003; Smith & Betz, 2000) and problem-solving skills (Bilgin & Akkapulu, 2007; Di Giunta, Eisenberg, Kupfer, Steca, Tramontano & Caprara, 2010; Matsushima & Shiomi, 2003).

When emotional self-efficacy is analysed, it is considered as a vital factor in pertaining good mental health and resiliency in coping with negative emotions during adolescence. This notion was proved in a research by Muris (2002) who reported that individuals with high level of emotional self-efficacy tend to have strong links with low level of depression and anxiety symptoms. Studies showed that emotional self-efficacy also has an indirect impact to the social behaviour of the adolescents. Similarly, Caprara, Regalia and Bandura (2002) elaborated that one's failure in controlling emotions can lead to destructive social behaviour. Thus, creating destructive social behaviour will drive the adolescents towards social with a drawl (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Pastorelli, 2001).

Many studies tend to focus on investigating the academic self-efficacy of adolescents compared to emotional and social self-efficacy. Malaysian researches pay little attention on analysing social and emotional self-efficacy of adolescents. Social and emotional factors are neglected as important elements to be analysed among adolescents compared to academic factors. Therefore, this study will make a productive, positive contribution in the Malaysian social science research.

**Differences in self-efficacy across gender**

Self-efficacy of the adolescents differs across the gender perspectives. Many studies have proven the differences in self-efficacy across gender. Muris (2001) in his research indicated that female adolescents have lower level of total self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli and Caprara's (1999) studies revealed that males have a higher level of self-efficacy scores than females. Furthermore, in a recent research by Milioni et al. (in press), male adolescents are said to score higher level of self-efficacy in managing negative emotions compared to their female counterparts. In the same research, it has been rectified that female adolescents have greater self-efficacy in expressing positive emotions than male adolescents. Studies undertaken by Coleman (2003) and Vera et al. (2004) showed that social self-efficacy of females is significantly higher than males.

However, many studies on the differences in self-efficacy of adolescents across gender originate from foreign countries. The divergences of cultural backgrounds and social norms are believed to influence the findings in Malaysian setting. Thus, this research is expected to produce an outcome that is reliable in our country.

**Self-efficacy and employability**

Adolescence is a stage of life that entails an individual experiencing struggles and controverting emotions on and off. This period of life is a fundamental platform for the adolescents to prepare themselves to enter the career world. Hence, employability is seen as a pivotal element for an individual to enter and sustain in a working environment. Based on economic-social perspectives, employability is referred as the competency of various classifications of the workforce to enter and sustain in employment (Finn, 2000), whereas success in employment is strongly associated with self-efficacy of an individual. This is supported in a research by Judge and Bono (2001) which proved that higher self-efficacy links to overall positive outcomes. In agreement with the above statement, the empirical evidence by Cakar (2012) pointed that individuals with greater self-efficacy tend to be more comfortable and productive during difficulties in the workplace compared to those lacking self-efficacy.

Furthermore, self-efficacy in employment by Dacre Pool and Qualter (2013) revealed that emotional self-efficacy is a crucial predictor in graduate employability. Apart from that, this research indicated
that graduate employability mediated the relationship between emotional self-efficacy and career satisfaction.

However, when looking at career self-efficacy, greater attention is given in analysing employment and organisational behaviour. Research by Lent and Hackett (1987) showed that career self-efficacy is a strong belief in an individual’s capabilities in selecting and adapting to an employment. Similarly, career-related self-efficacy tends to influence the career desires (Bandura, 2002). In terms of career interest, Turner and Lapan (2002) showed positive impact and assumed a series of career opportunities.

Other similar researches concluded that self-efficacy is related to the competence of finding a job, the number of job interviews and future career outcomes (Kanfer, Wanberg & Kantrowitz, 2001; Moynihan, Roehling, LePine & Boswell, 2003; Pinquart, Juang & Silbereisen, 2003). Likewise, there are empirical evidence that showed self-efficacy is positively correlated with the level of interest in career choice (Nauta, Kahn, Angell & Cantarelli, 2002).

In order to enter the employment field, it is important to realise the prominent role that self-efficacy plays in supporting career development of the young generations. There has been a significant amount of efforts contributed in proving the association between the importance of self-efficacy and employability skills, such as competence in handling with recent modifications in the career plan (Stumpf, Brief & Hartman, 1987), and the ability to be part of a team (Wood, Bandura & Bailey, 1990).

Although there are many studies that have indicated the effect of overall self-efficacy on organisational settings, there seems to have little research examining the links of social self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy with employability, particularly in Malaysian setting. This research will inevitably highlight the importance of understanding social and emotional self-efficacy in employment. Therefore, the finding is making this research a vital contribution in enhancing career development of the young generations in Malaysia.

**Method**

**Participants**

This study focused on adolescents between the ages of 17 and 19 from different academic achievement levels in Malaysia. The participants were categorised into three academic achievements, namely low achievers, average achievers and high achievers. The researchers selected samples (75 males and 94 females) to participate in this research.

**Sampling**

The researchers utilised stratified sampling in selecting the samples for this research. It is a probability sampling technique wherein the researchers distribute the entire population into different subgroups or strata, then select the final samples randomly from the different strata. The researchers who aim to focus a particular subgroup within the population use stratified sampling. This technique is beneficial in this research because it confirms the existence of the key subgroup within the sample. This sampling method has a higher statistical accuracy because it only requests a small number of sizes that can save a lot of time, money and effort of the researchers.

**Instruments**

Social and emotional self-efficacy of the adolescents comprises 16 items, which was adapted from the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C). Emotional self-efficacy is concerning the ability of coping with negative emotions and social self-efficacy is concentrating on the capability of building and sustaining in a positive relationship. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing not at all and 5 indicating very well.

**Procedure**

The researchers were given permission by the institution management to carry out the survey in the institute. Meanwhile, consent was sought from the students who volunteered to participate in the
study. These questionnaires were administered to the students who willingly took part in the survey. The questionnaires were distributed, completed and gathered on the same day. Researchers did not limit their time in completing the questionnaire; this was to encourage the participants to experience relax mode hence supporting the questionnaire responses. The freedom to complete the questionnaire enables the researchers to retain accurate and reliable responses. However, the participants managed to complete the questionnaire within 15 to 20 minutes.

Data analysis
Data of the research were processed and analysed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The researchers analysed the data through descriptive analysis and inferential statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used in analysing the demographic profiles of the participants and reliability of the questionnaire, such as mean score, standard deviation, percentage and frequency distribution. Inferential statistics that were used in the data analysis was an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to analyse the difference in social and emotional self-efficacy across gender and academic achievement level. This is the most suitable method since the researchers aim to compare the mean score of two or more particular groups to measure significant differences of average score of one group to the other groups (Howitt & Cramer, 2003).

Results

Demographic profile of the sample
According to Table 1, these participants are comprised of more female adolescents (55.6%) than male adolescents (44.4%) with the age range from 17 to 19 years. The larger portion of the sample (74.6%) falls into the urban residential area category.

Descriptive statistics for the SEQ-C
The descriptive results of the subscales of the SEQ-C representing the levels of self-reported self-efficacy are shown in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, these participants gained high mean self-efficacy scores in the social and emotional self-efficacy subscales. Compared to Muris (2001), the present participants gained slightly higher means on the emotional self-efficacy score.

Differences in self-efficacy across gender and academic achievement level
An ANOVA was employed to test the significant differences between males and females on the respective SEQ-C scores. Table 3 presents the findings of the gender-based group comparisons.

The results shown in Table 3 above indicated no significant differences found in emotional and social self-efficacy across gender. The finding for gender-based differences in social and emotional self-efficacy ($p > .05$) indicates adolescents did not report differently on their emotional and social self-efficacy.

| Variables             | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender                |           |                |
| Male                  | 75        | 44.4           |
| Female                | 94        | 55.6           |
| Residential area      |           |                |
| Rural                 | 43        | 25.4           |
| Urban                 | 126       | 74.6           |

| Scale                | Min | Max | Mean  | Std. deviation |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-------|----------------|
| Social self-efficacy | 12  | 37  | 26.75 | 4.704          |
| Emotional self-efficacy | 12  | 38  | 25.40 | 5.275          |
Table 3. Differences in self-efficacy across gender.

| Scale                  | Males (n = 75) | Females (n = 94) | df  | f    | p     |
|------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----|------|-------|
| Social self-efficacy   | 26.31 ± 5.52   | 27.10 ± 3.9      | 168 | 1.18 | .280  |
| Emotional self-efficacy| 25.16 ± 5.6    | 25.59 ± 5.0      | 168 | .27  | .604  |

Table 4. Differences in self-efficacy across academic achievement level.

| Scale                  | Lower (n = 50) | Average (n = 61) | High (n = 58) | df  | f    | p     |
|------------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|-----|------|-------|
| Social self-efficacy   | 26.82 (4.64)   | 26.62 (3.65)     | 26.8 (5.72)   | 168 | .032 | .968  |
| Emotional self-efficacy| 23.30 (5.12)   | 25.64 (4.22)     | 26.95 (5.87)  | 168 | 6.989| .001**|

**p < .001.

Table 4 shows that adolescents from different academic achievement levels reported significant differences in the emotional self-efficacy at an alpha level less than .001 of the adolescents in the group. Lower achievers reported the lowest mean in emotional self-efficacy, followed by average achievers and high achievers. However, the finding indicates that adolescents did not report differently on their social self-efficacy based on their achievement level.

Discussion

The focus of this study is to determine the reliability of the SEQ-C among Malaysian adolescents in the age range from 17 to 19 years old. Furthermore, an effort was made to establish if there were any significant differences in social and emotional self-efficacy of adolescents across gender and academic achievement level. Using a retrospective approach, a variety of statistical methods were used in producing the outcome of the data collected.

Reliability of SEQ-C in current study

Findings from the current research revealed that both social and emotional self-efficacy reported high mean score. However, the mean score of social self-efficacy is lower and mean score of emotional self-efficacy is slightly higher compared to Muris (2001). This outcome may be due to the limitation applied in eastern cultures regards to social skills which restrict the freedom and exposure of social elements among Malaysian adolescents. Therefore, the young generations tend to be unaware of those social elements and fail to respond accurately to social aspect questions in the survey.

Differences in self-efficacy across gender

An outcome that appeared in recent study indicated that there is no significant difference in social and emotional self-efficacy across gender in Malaysian adolescents. The trend is similar to the findings by Tenaw (2013), stated that there is no significant difference in self-efficacy of male and female. Furthermore, the research by Iskender (2009) supported the finding of this current research as there is no significant difference in self-efficacy regards gender. Conversely, the current outcome contradicts to many previous studies that showed there is a significant difference in social and emotional self-efficacy across gender. Coleman (2003) reported that the social self-efficacy of female adolescents is significantly higher than the male adolescents. Likewise, Vera et al. (2004) also generated comparable findings as the study rectified that female students’ social self-efficacy is significantly higher than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the study of Muris (2002) showed that the female students have lower emotional self-efficacy than male students. Similarly, Shkullaku (2013) rectified that there is a significant difference in the self-efficacy across gender. A potential reason for this finding may be due to the mutual social and emotional freedom experienced by the male and female adolescents in Malaysia. Since Malaysia
has reached to a stage where the male and female are treated equally in terms of education, career opportunity and development, social and emotional self-efficacy are not significantly different across gender. This notion is proved by the statistics of students’ admission in higher education year 2012, where about 66.7% of the candidates are female. In addition, the intake of students in Malaysian higher education for a first degree in year 2013/2014 academic session shows about 68.02% or 28,280 of 41,573 applicants are female candidates. Furthermore, labour participation rate in Malaysia was 52.4% in the year 2013. Apart from that, Hays Asia Salary Guide 2015 showed that employment of Malaysian female in senior management has risen up from 29% in year 2014 to 34% in the year 2015. Thus, it is clearly proven the equality shared by male and female in educational and career opportunities in Malaysia. In addition, limited numbers of participants were involved in this study, which probably fails to represent the adolescent population in Malaysia. So, there are possibilities to retrieve the outcome by increasing the number of participants.

**Differences in self-efficacy across academic achievement level**

Further analysis of the study revealed that there is no significant difference in social self-efficacy across academic achievement. However, some studies are in contrast to the current finding. Hampton and Mason (2003) found that students with learning disabilities reported lower social self-efficacy than the non-learning disability participants. At the age of 17 to 19, the adolescents are believed to be exposed to a common type of social life since all the participants in this study are located in a tertiary education. So, the pattern and type of social life for the samples is pretty much similar to each other. Therefore, the social self-efficacy is not significantly differing across academic ability of an individual. However, the findings on emotional self-efficacy revealed there is a significant difference in the emotional self-efficacy across academic achievement. The emotional self-efficacy of low achievers is lower than average and high achievers. Academic ability of an individual has a vulnerability in driving the adolescence towards academic stress and confidence. Thus, the low achievers tend to experience inability in mastering emotional self-efficacy compared to high achievers.

**Conclusions**

**Limitations**

The fundamental finding that stands up from this study have made development and contribution in terms of theoretically to the research of self-efficacy among adolescents. Thus, the recent study has given a platform for considerable advancement into the importance and characteristics of both social and emotional self-efficacy. However, there are a number of limitations in this study that could lead towards further studies. For example, self-report methodology that is utilised in gathering the data of the study. The complexity of social and emotional self-efficacy may restrict in gaining the realistic evaluations through self-report methodology. Therefore, consideration on qualitative method should be given in this research and it is believed to be more effective in generating better outcomes as proved in the study of Lent, Brown et al. (1996). In addition, the study selected small number of participants that are limited to three types of specific academic settings due to time constraints. Thus, it is questionable whether the findings can be generalised to different age groups from different settings. Therefore, replication of this research could aim other population to produce a robust relationship among the components analysed in this study. Finally, the samples were selected using purposive sampling in this study and therefore this may restrict the generalisation of findings of this study to the general population of adolescents in Malaysia.

**Recommendations**

In order to enhance the research in this field, some recommendations are proposed:

Firstly, the researcher should involve a larger number of participants from varied academic settings to ensure the heterogeneity of the participants. Thus, the outcome of the study can be generalised to represent the larger population of adolescents in Malaysia. In addition, the mix method approach
in gathering the data can be considered in producing reliable finding. Furthermore, the researchers’ suggestions include utilisation of probability sampling method, such as random sampling in collecting data to make sure the findings of the result to have a representation of the adolescent population in this study. Apart from that, developing a psychological instrument to assess social and emotional self-efficacy of the adolescents in Malaysian context should be given attention as well. It will ensure the validity and reliability of the findings on self-efficacy in future research.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**Funding**

This work was supported by the National University of Malaysia, under the Long-term Research Grant Scheme [LRGS/2013/UMK-UKM/SS/04].

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