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The Influence of Motivation, Social Skills, and Empathy on the Employee Performance in the Education Industry

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Abstract

This study examines the relationships between empathy, social skills, motivation, and employee performance in the education sector. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were collected through surveys administered to educators in various educational institutions. The analysis revealed positive correlations of all independent variables, empathy, social skills, and motivation towards employee performance, indicating that these emotional and social factors significantly contribute to enhancing effectiveness among educators. The findings emphasize the importance of understanding these relationships for educational leaders and policymakers aiming to create a supportive and productive workplace environment. By prioritizing the development of empathy and social skills through targeted training programs, educational institutions can improve employee motivation and performance, ultimately benefiting student outcomes. Future research should explore longitudinal studies, intervention programs, and qualitative insights to investigate these dynamics within different educational contexts.

Keywords: Motivation, Empathy, Social Skills, Employee Performance, Education, Emotional Intelligence

Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of education, effective leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping students' and educators' experiences and outcomes. In this context, the concept of emotional intelligence, a facet of human intelligence that pertains to the awareness and management of one's own emotions and those of others, has emerged as a critical factor in educational leadership. This study delves into the intriguing and multifaceted relationship between emotional intelligence and the effectiveness of educational leaders. With a focus on the ways in which emotional intelligence impacts decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and overall leadership efficacy, this research endeavours to shed light on the profound influence that emotional intelligence exerts within the realm of educational leadership. By exploring the nuanced dimensions of this connection, we aim to enhance our understanding of how emotional intelligence can be harnessed to foster more successful

educational leadership, ultimately benefitting students, teachers, and educational institutions as a whole. The realm of education is a complex and ever-evolving one, shaped by a myriad of factors that influence its direction and success. At the heart of this intricate ecosystem are educational leaders, such as principals, superintendents, and administrators, who are tasked with making crucial decisions, setting a vision for their institutions, and nurturing a positive and productive environment for both students and educators. It's widely recognized that these leaders need more than just academic knowledge and administrative skills to excel in their roles. This is where emotional intelligence comes into play. Emotional Intelligence, often abbreviated as EI or EQ, encompasses the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and those of others. It involves skills such as empathy, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and effective communication. In educational leadership, these skills can be invaluable, as leaders interact with a diverse range of stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, and policymakers. The influence of emotional intelligence on educational leadership is a topic of growing interest and significance (Shaari et al., 2023). Leaders who possess a high level of emotional intelligence are often better equipped to navigate the complex and emotionally charged situations that can arise in educational settings. They can build trust, establish strong relationships, and effectively manage conflicts. Furthermore, they are often more attuned to the emotional needs of their staff and students, which can lead to a more supportive and nurturing learning environment. This research aims to delve deeper into the intricate dynamics between emotional intelligence and educational leadership effectiveness. It seeks to answer questions such as: How does emotional intelligence impact decision-making in educational leadership? What is the role of emotional intelligence in building a positive school culture and climate? Can emotional intelligence training enhance leadership skills and outcomes in educational settings? By exploring these and other questions, this study ultimately aspires to provide valuable insights into how educational leaders can harness emotional intelligence to become more effective in their roles. This, in turn, may have a profound impact on the quality of education and the well-being of all those involved in the educational process.

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence Theory

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and the emotions of others (Goleman, 1995). Studies indicate that employees with high emotional intelligence are more likely to perform well, as they can navigate social complexities in the workplace and manage stress effectively (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Research by Cherniss (2010) suggests that emotional intelligence contributes significantly to various aspects of employee performance, including productivity, teamwork, and leadership effectiveness. Research indicates that motivated employees are more likely to exceed performance expectations and contribute positively to organizational goals (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). A meta-analysis by Salovey and Mayer (1990) highlights the role of motivation in emotional intelligence as it influences decision-making and adaptive behaviors in the workplace. Moreover, social skills enhance teamwork and cooperation, which are essential for achieving collective organizational goals (Jordan & Troth, 2004). A study by McCleskey (2014) demonstrates that employees who exhibit high social competence not only contribute to their own performance but also elevate the performance of their colleagues, thereby fostering a culture of high achievement within the organization. Empathy also enhances customer relations, as employees who can understand and respond to

customer emotions create better service experiences, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty (Pérez & González, 2018). A study by Sy, Tram, and O'Hara (2006) found that empathy directly correlates with job performance, highlighting its role in enhancing interpersonal relationships and fostering a positive work environment.

Relationship between Motivation and Employee Performance

Recent empirical studies have reinforced the connection between motivation and employee performance. For instance, a study by Javed et al. (2021) examined the role of motivational factors in shaping employee performance in the banking sector. The findings revealed that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators significantly influenced employees' job performance, with intrinsic factors having a more substantial impact. Employees who felt a sense of autonomy and competence reported higher performance levels, affirming the principles of SDT (Malik, et al, 2018). Similarly, a meta-analysis conducted by Bobbio et al. (2022) explored the relationship between motivation and performance across multiple industries. The study concluded that motivation is a strong predictor of performance, with factors such as recognition, feedback, and professional development opportunities enhancing motivation levels and subsequently improving performance outcomes. Furthermore, motivational strategies tailored to meet individual employee needs can lead to improved performance. According to a study by Kahn et al. (2021), organizations that implemented personalized motivation strategies, such as flexible work arrangements and tailored training programs, observed significant improvements in employee performance metrics. This underscores the necessity of understanding employees' unique motivational drivers to enhance overall performance.

Relationship between Social Skills and Employee Performance

Social skills encompass a range of competencies, including communication, empathy, teamwork, and conflict resolution (Williams et al., 2021). These skills enable individuals to interact effectively with others, fostering collaboration and a positive work environment. Recent studies have emphasized that social skills are not merely interpersonal abilities but are essential for navigating the complexities of modern workplaces (Bourne et al., 2022). Effective communication is a cornerstone of social skills that directly influences employee performance. A study by Liu et al. (2023) found that employees with strong communication skills are better able to convey their ideas, leading to enhanced collaboration and improved team performance. Furthermore, teamwork, often a product of effective social skills, has been linked to higher job satisfaction and productivity (Kumar & Gupta, 2021). Social skills are essential for leadership effectiveness. Leaders who possess strong social skills can inspire and motivate their teams, fostering a sense of belonging and commitment. Research by Adams et al. (2021) suggests that leaders with high social skills are more likely to engage their employees, resulting in higher levels of performance and organizational loyalty.

Relationship between Empathy and Employee Performance

One critical aspect of empathy in the workplace is its role in enhancing interpersonal relationships among employees. According to the study by Neff and Germer (2021), empathic leaders foster an environment of trust and collaboration, which positively affects team performance. They argue that leaders who exhibit empathy are better equipped to understand their team members' challenges and motivations, leading to improved morale and productivity. This aligns with earlier findings by Wang et al. (2021), who noted that

empathetic leadership contributes significantly to employees' job satisfaction, which in turn boosts their performance levels. Furthermore, empathy has been shown to enhance conflict resolution skills within teams. A study by Goleman et al. (2022) emphasizes that empathetic individuals are more likely to approach conflicts with a constructive mindset, facilitating smoother interactions and resolutions. This capability not only minimizes disruptions but also promotes a harmonious work environment that enhances overall performance.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach to examine the factors influencing employee performance in the education sectors. A total of 136 employees in the education industry in Selangor, Malaysia, were selected using purposive sampling. Data was collected through a structured survey designed to measure variables related to employee performance. The survey instrument, which included 28 items focused on key topics such as motivation, social skills, and empathy, was pilot tested with 30 participants, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, indicating good reliability. Quantitative data were analyzed using SMART-PLS to conduct the analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants to ensure confidentiality and the right to withdraw. This study acknowledges limitations such as the sample size and geographic focus, which may affect the generalizability of the findings.

Findings

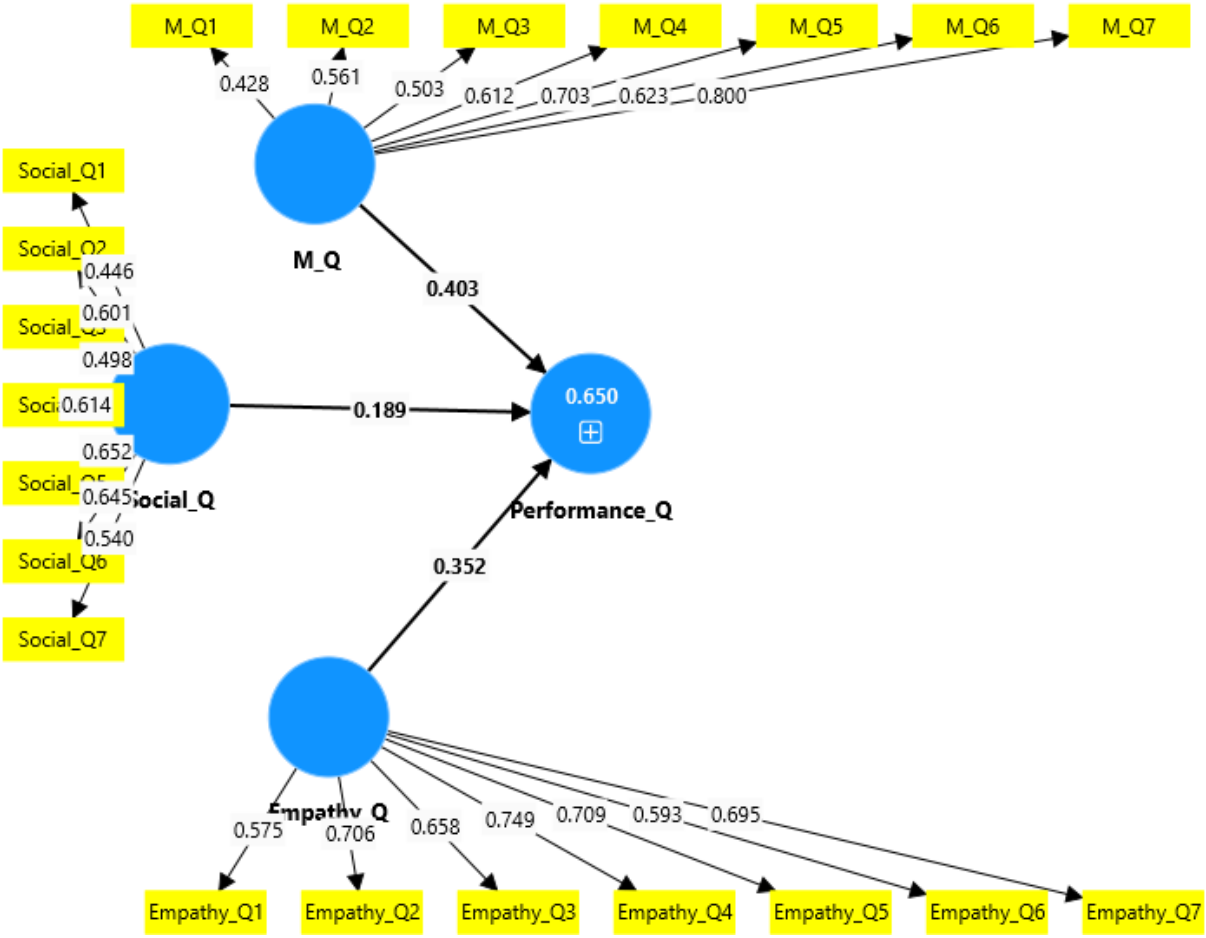

Figure 1 Research Model

Table 1
Construct Validity and Reliability

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Empathy_Q	0.796	0.803	0.851	0.452
M_Q	0.718	0.746	0.804	0.378
Performance_Q	0.790	0.793	0.847	0.444
Social_Q	0.664	0.674	0.773	0.331

The reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Empathy_Q demonstrated the highest reliability with a score of 0.796, indicating strong internal consistency. Performance_Q also showed good reliability at 0.790. M_Q had a moderate reliability of 0.718, while Social_Q had the lowest reliability at 0.664, suggesting potential issues in measurement consistency for this construct. Composite reliability further supported these findings, with Empathy_Q achieving scores of 0.803 (rho_a) and 0.851 (rho_c), and Performance_Q scoring 0.793 (rho_a) and 0.847 (rho_c). M_Q's composite reliability was acceptable at 0.746 (rho_a) and 0.804 (rho_c). In contrast, Social_Q's scores of 0.674 (rho_a) and 0.773 (rho_c) highlighted concerns about its reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) values indicated the extent to which the constructs explain the variance in their respective items. Empathy_Q had an AVE of 0.452, and Performance_Q had an AVE of 0.444, suggesting reasonable convergent validity. However, M_Q (AVE = 0.378) and Social_Q (AVE = 0.331) indicated lower explanatory power and potential validity issues.

Table 2
Path Coefficient

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Empathy_Q -> Performance_Q	0.352	0.357	0.096	3.670	0.000
M_Q -> Performance_Q	0.403	0.395	0.087	4.621	0.000
Social_Q -> Performance_Q	0.189	0.203	0.086	2.188	0.029

The relationship between empathy and performance quality (Empathy_Q -> Performance_Q) yielded an original sample value of 0.352, with a sample mean of 0.357 and a standard deviation of 0.096. The T statistic for this relationship was calculated to be 3.670, which indicates a substantial effect size. The P value associated with this finding was 0.000, signifying that the relationship is statistically significant. This suggests that higher levels of empathy are correlated with improved performance quality, highlighting the importance of emotional awareness in professional settings. The analysis of motivation's impact on performance (M_Q -> Performance_Q) showed an original sample value of 0.403 and a sample mean of 0.395, with a standard deviation of 0.087. The T statistics for this relationship reached an impressive 4.621, indicating a very strong effect. The corresponding P value of 0.000 reinforces the

conclusion that motivation significantly affects performance quality. These findings suggest that fostering motivation among employees could lead to enhanced performance, emphasizing the need for organizations to cultivate motivational strategies. Lastly, the relationship between social skills and performance quality (Social_Q -> Performance_Q) produced an original sample value of 0.189 and a sample mean of 0.203, accompanied by a standard deviation of 0.086. The T statistic here was 2.188, which, while lower than the previous two relationships, still indicates a noteworthy effect. The P value of 0.029 confirms the statistical significance of this relationship. This finding implies that social skills also play a role in influencing performance quality, albeit to a lesser extent than empathy and motivation.

Table 3
Model Fit – Inner Model

	Saturated model	**Estimated model**
SRMR	0.099	0.099
d_ULS	3.998	3.998
d_G	1.454	1.454
Chi-square	893.900	893.900
NFI	0.473	0.473

Both the saturated model and the estimated model presented identical values across several fit indices, indicating consistency in their structural representation. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), a widely accepted measure for assessing the fit of SEM models, yielded a value of 0.099 for both models. Generally, a value below 0.08 is preferable, suggesting that both models exhibit a moderate level of misfit. This finding highlights that there may be room for improvement in the model specifications to better align with the observed data. The d_ULS (distance-based measure of fit) and d_G (geodesic distance measure) also reflected equal values of 3.998 and 1.454, respectively, for both models. These measures are essential in evaluating the discrepancy between the observed and predicted covariance matrices. A d_ULS value close to zero signifies a closer fit, while the d_G value assesses the overall discrepancy between models, where lower values indicate a better fit. The equality of these metrics across both models indicates that their structural equations produce similar levels of divergence from the actual data. The Chi-square statistic, reported at 893.900 for both models, serves as a crucial test of the overall model fit. A significant Chi-square indicates a poor fit; however, it is important to consider that this statistic is sensitive to sample size. As such, a non-significant Chi-square does not automatically denote a good fit without consideration of other indices. Here, both models present a similar degree of fit concerning the theoretical constructs under investigation. Lastly, the Normed Fit Index (NFI), which measures the proportionate improvement in fit of the proposed model relative to a baseline model, yielded a value of 0.473 for both models. NFI values range from 0 to 1, with values above 0.9 typically indicating a good fit. The observed value suggests that neither model demonstrates a strong improvement over the baseline, prompting further refinement of the theoretical constructs and their interrelationships.

Table 4
Discriminant Validity - HTMT

	Empathy_Q	M_Q	Performance_Q	Social_Q
Empathy_Q				
M_Q	0.667			
Performance_Q	0.820	0.926		
Social_Q	0.797	0.986	0.896	

The HTMT ratio is calculated by dividing the average correlations between different constructs (heterotrait correlations) by the average correlations within the same construct (monotrait correlations). In this case, the correlations suggest varying degrees of relationship among the constructs, indicating their potential overlap and distinctiveness. From the matrix, we observe a notable correlation of 0.667 between Empathy and Motivation. While this indicates a positive relationship, it is not excessively high, suggesting that these constructs may represent unique dimensions of emotional and motivational states. In contrast, the correlation between Performance and Motivation is particularly strong, at 0.926, while Performance and Empathy also exhibit a high correlation of 0.820. Such high correlations can raise concerns regarding the discriminant validity of these constructs, as they suggest a substantial degree of shared variance. Social Support presents a similar pattern in its correlations with the other constructs. The correlation with Motivation stands at 0.986, indicating a very strong relationship. This high correlation suggests that social support is a significant factor in motivating individuals, but it also raises questions about the distinctiveness of these constructs. The correlation between Social Support and Empathy is moderately high at 0.797, further supporting the interconnectedness of these variables. For effective HTMT analysis, researchers typically seek to ensure that the HTMT ratios are below the threshold of 0.85 or 0.90, depending on the context. Given the correlations presented in the table, it appears that the HTMT ratios for the relationships among these constructs may remain within acceptable limits, particularly for Empathy and Motivation, which are less correlated compared to others. However, the extremely high correlation between Social Support and Motivation suggests that these two constructs may not be as distinct as ideally desired for robust discriminant validity.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that all independent variables, empathy, social skills, and motivation which are positively correlated with the dependent variable of employee performance within the education sector. This finding underscores the importance of these emotional and social constructs in influencing how employees perform in their roles. Empathy, as a critical interpersonal skill, allows educators and staff to connect with students and colleagues effectively, fostering an environment conducive to collaboration and support. This connection can enhance motivation among employees, as they feel understood and valued within their workplace. Similarly, strong social skills facilitate communication and collaboration, further bolstering motivation and, consequently, employee performance. Understanding these relationships is crucial for educational leaders and policymakers. By prioritizing the development of empathy and social skills among educators, institutions can create a more motivated workforce, leading to improved performance outcomes. This highlights the need for training and professional development programs that not only focus

on technical skills but also emphasize emotional intelligence and interpersonal relations. In conclusion, recognizing the relationship between empathy, social skills, and motivation provides valuable insights for enhancing employee performance in the education sector. As educational environments continue to evolve, fostering these qualities will be essential for promoting a positive and productive workplace culture that benefits both employees and students alike.

Contribution

Theoretically, this study reinforces emotional intelligence as a significant factor in organizational performance, specifically in environments like education that rely on interpersonal engagement and support. Emotional intelligence theory traditionally emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, empathy, and social skills for effective interaction and leadership. The present research validates this by showing that empathy (the ability to understand others' feelings), motivation (the drive to achieve organizational goals), and social connection (the capacity for effective teamwork) contribute to better outcomes in educational organizations. By focusing on these three dimensions, the study adds depth to emotional intelligence theory, suggesting that specific traits may be more relevant in performance-driven environments such as education. In context, this study offers practical insights for the education sector, where organizational success depends heavily on strong, supportive relationships among educators, administrators, and students. The findings suggest that by fostering empathy, motivation, and social bonds, educational institutions can enhance team effectiveness and overall productivity. This aligns with the idea that investing in emotional intelligence is crucial for improving the performance and culture within educational organizations.

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