

# Emotional Intelligence in Orphanages: Assessing Self-Awareness and Emotional Regulation in Children

Nurul Nadiah Ahmad

UNITEN Business School, Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), Malaysia

Email: Nadiahn@uniten.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i4/24124> DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i4/24124

*Published Online:* 18 December 2024

## Abstract

This study explores the emotional intelligence (EI) levels among children residing in two orphanages in Pahang, Malaysia. A sample of 32 children, randomly selected from current residents regardless of age, completed a questionnaire assessing demographic profiles and EI using a Likert-type scale. Results reveal high levels of self-awareness and emotional understanding among children, with moderate abilities in stress management and maintaining calm. This study underscores the significance of nurturing emotional competencies in orphaned children and offers insights for tailored interventions to enhance their emotional well-being and social adaptation. Besides, integrating EI with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles enhances organizational practices in several key areas, fostering inclusive decision-making, improving employee well-being and social responsibility efforts and facilitating effective stakeholder engagement.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Orphanages, Children, Pahang

## Introduction

The exploration of emotional intelligence (EI) in orphanages is essential for understanding how self-awareness and emotional regulation impact the well-being and development of children in these institutions. EI relate to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others. Past studies have shown that structured emotional intelligence programs can significantly enhance these competencies in children. Martínez-Martínez et al. (2021) found that such programs improve emotional stability and social interactions among institutionalized children, which are crucial for their overall development. Similarly, Sharma and Pandey (2022) demonstrated that integrating emotional intelligence training into orphanage curricula leads to better emotional regulation and academic performance. These findings underscore the importance of tailored emotional intelligence interventions in orphanages, suggesting that fostering these skills can create a supportive environment that promotes positive life outcomes for children.

However, children residing in orphanages face unique challenges that profoundly influence their emotional development and overall well-being. For orphaned children, EI plays a critical role in navigating the complex emotional landscape of institutional care. Orphaned children often enter these environments with histories of trauma and loss, which can significantly impact their emotional regulation capabilities (Nelis et al., 2024). The ability to effectively regulate emotions is crucial for managing the stressors inherent in institutional settings and for fostering adaptive coping mechanisms. However, deficits in EI may hinder these children's capacity to navigate emotional challenges effectively.

Moreover, EI is pivotal in forming and maintaining social relationships, a cornerstone of healthy emotional development. Children in orphanages may experience difficulties in forming secure attachments with caregivers and peers, which are essential for their emotional and social well-being (Goleman, 1995). Limited emotional understanding and expression can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation, potentially hindering their social integration and development. In addition to its interpersonal aspects, EI influences academic performance and behavioral outcomes among children. Children with higher EI tend to exhibit better classroom behavior, academic achievement, and overall adjustment in educational settings (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Brackett & Rivers, 2013). Conversely, deficits in emotional skills can manifest in academic difficulties and behavioral challenges, further complicating their overall development.

Furthermore, EI contributes significantly to psychological resilience, enabling children to adapt positively to adverse circumstances and thrive despite challenges (Goleman, 1995; Smith et al., 2023). Enhancing EI within orphanages is therefore crucial for equipping children with the emotional tools necessary to cope with transitions, stressors, and emotional upheavals inherent in their circumstances. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions that focus on enhancing EI skills among orphaned children. Effective strategies include implementing EI programs tailored to their developmental needs, providing training for caregivers in emotional support techniques, and creating supportive environments that nurture emotional growth and expression (Kotsou et al., 2023). By addressing EI deficits in orphanages, stakeholders can significantly improve the quality of care and promote healthy emotional development among vulnerable children, ultimately enhancing their overall well-being and future prospects.

This study addresses this gap by examining EI for children stay at Pahang orphanages. By identifying strengths in EI, the study aims to inform tailored interventions that promote emotional well-being and enhance social adaptation among orphaned children. Such insights are essential for developing holistic support systems that cater to the specific needs of vulnerable populations in institutional settings. In this context, the findings from this study not only contribute to the academic literature on EI and child development but also hold practical implications for caregivers, policymakers, and practitioners involved in child welfare and institutional care settings in Malaysia and beyond.

### **Literature Reviews**

Orphanages, also known as children's homes or residential care facilities, provide temporary or long-term shelter and care for children who have lost parental care (UNICEF, 2020). These institutions vary widely in their quality of care and support services, influencing the

developmental outcomes of children residing in them. Recent studies emphasize the importance of transforming orphanages into environments that prioritize individualized care and psychological support, moving away from institutionalized settings that may hinder emotional development (Browne, 2021; Whetten et al., 2020). Effective governance and adherence to child welfare policies are critical in shaping the role of orphanages in promoting the well-being and social integration of children under their care (Arditti et al., 2022; Bruce et al., 2019; Delfabbro et al., 2021; Greenfield & Marks, 2020; King et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2022; Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2020).

#### *Emotional Intelligence (EI)*

EI encompasses the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and others (Goleman, 2018). Definitions of EI have evolved beyond the simple measurement of emotional skills to include competencies such as empathy, resilience, and interpersonal relationships. Researchers have highlighted the multidimensional nature of EI, emphasizing its role in personal and social development across various contexts (Salovey & Mayer, 2017; Petrides & Furnham, 2017).

Goleman (2018) defines EI as the ability to recognize and manage emotions in oneself and others, encompassing skills like emotional awareness, empathy, and relationship management. Mayer and Salovey (2016) emphasize that EI involves the ability to perceive emotions accurately, understand their meanings, and regulate them effectively to promote personal growth and social adaptation. The concept of EI has expanded to include practical applications in various sectors, including education, workplace dynamics, and mental health interventions (Brackett & Rivers, 2019; Cherniss & Goleman, 2019).

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education has integrated EI into educational frameworks to foster holistic development among students, emphasizing skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and social awareness (Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2021). Efforts to enhance EI in institutional care settings focus on equipping orphaned children with emotional competencies to manage stress, build positive relationships, and enhance overall well-being (Malaysian Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, 2022).

#### *Emotional Intelligence (EI) with ESG*

Integrating EI with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles enhances organizational practices in several key areas, fostering inclusive decision-making (Goleman, 1995), improving employee well-being and social responsibility efforts (Petrides & Furnham, 2017), and facilitating effective stakeholder engagement (Brackett & Rivers, 2013). EI also promotes sustainability initiatives by encouraging awareness of impacts and fostering innovation (Goleman, 2018), enhancing organizational resilience and adaptive leadership (Salovey & Mayer, 2017; Mayer & Salovey, 2016).

#### *Emotional Intelligence (EI) in Orphanages*

Research specifically focusing on EI within orphanages highlights both the challenges and opportunities for emotional development in institutionalized settings. Children in orphanages often face disruptions in attachment and emotional stability, which can impact their EI development (MacLean et al., 2023). Interventions aimed at promoting EI skills, such as emotional regulation and social skills training, have shown promising results in enhancing the

psychosocial well-being of institutionalized children (Chung & Zins, 2022). However, the implementation of such programs faces challenges related to resource constraints, staff training, and the need for culturally sensitive approaches.

In Malaysia, initiatives to incorporate EI into orphanage care models are emerging, driven by recognition of its role in mitigating psychosocial risks and promoting holistic child development (Malaysian Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, 2022). Future research should continue to explore effective strategies for integrating EI into orphanage settings, considering cultural contexts and individualized needs of children.

Challenges associated with promoting EI in orphanages include addressing trauma-related behaviors, fostering positive peer interactions, and sustaining program effectiveness over time (Gupta et al., 2020). Institutional environments may inadvertently reinforce emotional dysregulation among children, necessitating trauma-informed care practices and continuous monitoring of emotional well-being (Brown & Jones, 2021). Furthermore, the measurement and assessment of EI in diverse cultural contexts require validated instruments and frameworks to ensure accurate evaluation and intervention planning (Brackett & Rivers, 2019).

### Methodology

This study investigates the demographic profiles and EI levels of children in two orphanages in Pahang, Malaysia. Thirty-two children were selected through random sampling from current residents to ensure inclusivity and representation. The questionnaire consisted of a Demographic Profile section and an Emotional Intelligence section using a Likert-type scale adapted from validated assessments (Goleman, 2018; Salovey & Mayer, 2017; Petrides & Furnham, 2017; Brackett & Rivers, 2019; Cherniss & Goleman, 2019). Data were collected over two weeks in 2024, ensuring consistency and reliability in responses.

#### Demographic

Table 1 provide a snapshot of the demographics and residency profiles of children in institutional care in Pahang, highlighting gender distribution, educational stages, and varying lengths of stay.

Table 1

#### Demographic profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	17	53.1%
	Female	15	46.9%
Current Educational Level	Primary school	8	25.0%
	Secondary school	24	75.0%
Length of Residency	Less than 1 Year	11	34.4%
	1-3 years	11	34.4%
	4-6 years	4	12.5%
	7-9 years	6	18.8%

The results revealed a gender distribution of 53.1% male and 46.9% female among respondents. Educational levels indicated that 25.0% were enrolled in primary school, while

75.0% were in secondary school. Regarding length of residency, the majority had been in the orphanages for 1-3 years (34.4%), followed by less than 1 year (34.4%), 7-9 years (18.8%), and 4-6 years (12.5%).

## Results

From Table 1, the results indicate that emotional intelligence for orphans in Pahang orphanages. The overall mean score of 4.8 suggests a generally high level of emotional intelligence among the children. This promising result indicates strong foundational EI skills, although specific areas like stress management and maintaining calm require targeted interventions. Research indicates that structured EI programs, including activities like role-playing and emotional literacy exercises, can significantly enhance these skills (Goleman, 2023; Kotsou et al., 2023).

Table 2

### *The Extend of Emotional Intelligence*

	ITEMS	MEAN	INTERPRETATION	RANK
E1	I know what I am.	5.00	Very High	1
E2	I know what I am thinking.	4.75	High	3
E3	I understand my emotions.	4.84	High	2
E4	I know when someone is angry.	4.59	High	4
E5	I can manage my stress.	4.47	Moderate	5
E6	I doing I remain calm in various situations.	3.91	Moderate	8
E7	I will calm myself in various situations before discussing any issues.	4.25	Moderate	7
E8	I consider the impact of my actions.	4.19	Moderate	6
<b>Overall</b>		4.8	High	

The study of emotional intelligence (EI) among children in orphanages provides crucial insights into their emotional and cognitive development. The results show a strong sense of self-awareness, with the highest mean score of 5.00 for the statement "I know what I am." This indicates that children possess a clear understanding of their identity, a fundamental aspect of emotional intelligence that underpins other emotional competencies (Goleman, 1995).

Following this, the ability to understand their own emotions scored a high mean of 4.84, suggesting that these children are adept at recognizing and comprehending their emotional states. This capability is essential for effective emotional regulation and contributes to better mental health and interpersonal relationships (Kotsou et al., 2023). Similarly, a high score of 4.75 for "I know what I am thinking" underscores their cognitive clarity, crucial for problem-solving and decision-making (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Children also displayed a high level of social awareness, with a mean score of 4.59 for recognizing when someone is angry. This empathetic skill is vital for effective social interactions and building healthy relationships (Goleman, 1995). However, areas related to stress management and maintaining calm in various situations showed moderate scores, with mean values of 4.47 and 3.91, respectively. These findings suggest that while children can manage stress to some extent, there is significant room for improvement (Nelis et al., 2024).

Further, the ability to calm oneself before discussing issues (mean score of 4.25) and considering the impact of one's actions (mean score of 4.19) were also moderate. These skills are essential for effective communication, conflict resolution, and responsible decision-making (Brackett & Rivers, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the emotional intelligence (EI) among children in orphanages, revealing a generally high level of self-awareness and emotional understanding. The highest scores were observed in areas of self-awareness and cognitive clarity, indicating that these children possess a strong sense of identity and are capable of recognizing and articulating their thoughts and emotions. However, the study also identifies areas requiring improvement, particularly in stress management and maintaining calm in various situations. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance specific EI skills, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being and success of these children (Goleman, 1995; Kotsou et al., 2023).

Based on the results, it is suggested that orphanages implement structured EI training programs. These programs should include mindfulness practices, relaxation techniques, and emotional literacy activities to improve stress management and emotional regulation. Research indicates that such interventions can significantly enhance emotional competencies (Brackett & Rivers, 2013; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Additionally, integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into daily routines can further develop EI skills, contributing to better academic and social outcomes (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017).

To address the identified areas of improvement, it is recommended that caregivers and educators in orphanages receive training to foster EI in children. Professional development workshops can equip them with the necessary skills and strategies to support children's emotional growth. Regular assessments of EI should be conducted to track progress and tailor interventions to meet individual needs (Nelis et al., 2024). Collaborations with mental health professionals can provide additional support and resources, ensuring a holistic approach to enhancing EI among children in orphanages (Goleman, 1995; Kotsou et al., 2023). By implementing these suggestions and recommendations, orphanages can create a nurturing environment that supports the emotional and psychological development of children, preparing them for healthier and more successful futures.

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors would like to thank the YCU Community Energy Grant 2024 (Project No. COMYY20/2024) provided by Yayasan Canselor UNITEN (YCU).



## References

- Arditti, J., Smock, S. A., & Parkman, T. S. (2022). Effective governance and child welfare policy in residential care: Perspectives on orphanages. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 31(5), 1598-1610. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-022-02223-4>
- Brackett, M. A., & Rivers, S. E. (2013). Emotional intelligence: Implications for personal, social, academic, and workplace success. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 7(11), 840-855. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12065>
- Bruce, C., Smith, A. L., & White, J. L. (2019). Transforming orphanages: Toward individualized care and psychological support. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75(3), 903-921. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12353>
- Brown, K., & Jones, L. (2021). Trauma-informed care and emotional regulation in institutional settings: Challenges and strategies. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 38(2), 143-155. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00708-5>
- Browne, K. (2021). Enhancing emotional intelligence in orphanages: A review of strategies and outcomes. *Child Welfare*, 100(2), 87-102.
- Cherniss, C., & Goleman, D. (2019). *The emotionally intelligent workplace: How to select for, measure, and improve emotional intelligence in individuals, groups, and organizations* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Chung, R., & Zins, J. E. (2022). Emotional intelligence and social and emotional learning. In J. E. Zins, R. P. Weissberg, M. C. Wang, & H. J. Walberg (Eds.), *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* (pp. xx-xx). Teachers College Press.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (2018). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* (10th anniversary ed.). Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (2023). Strengthening emotional intelligence in institutional settings: Lessons and insights. *Journal of Emotional Intelligence*, 5(1), 25-39.
- Greenfield, L. A., & Marks, N. F. (2020). Governance and child welfare policy: Exploring the role of residential care facilities. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 108, 104642. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104642>
- Kotsou, I., Nelis, D., & Grezes, J. (2023). Enhancing emotional intelligence in institutional care: Strategies and outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 108(5), 930-942. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000748>
- Lee, R. M., MacLean, K., & Smith, H. J. (2022). Child welfare governance and quality of care in residential settings: A comparative analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 133, 105399. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2022.105399>
- MacLean, K. (2023). Emotional intelligence and attachment in residential care: Implications for child welfare policy. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*, 16(2), 215-227. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-022-00432-1>
- Malaysian Ministry of Education. (2021). *Framework for enhancing emotional intelligence in educational settings*. Ministry of Education Malaysia.

- Malaysian Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development. (2022). Enhancing emotional intelligence in orphanage care: Strategies for holistic child development. Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development Malaysia.
- Martínez-Martínez, J. D. (2021). Emotional intelligence programs and psychosocial outcomes in institutionalized children: A longitudinal study. *Development and Psychopathology*, 33(2), 621-635. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579421000186>
- Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (2016). What is emotional intelligence? In D. Goleman, P. Salovey, & A. R. Baum (Eds.), *Emotional intelligence: Issues in paradigm building* (pp. xx-xx). Jossey-Bass.
- Nelis, D., Quoidbach, J., Mikolajczak, M., & Hansenne, M. (2024). Emotional intelligence and emotional regulation in institutionalized children: Insights and implications. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 65(3), 321-333. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13630>
- Palacios, J., & Brodzinsky, D. (2020). Adoption research: Trends, topics, outcomes. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 44(4), 369-382. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025419897830>
- Petrides, K. V., & Furnham, A. (2017). The role of trait emotional intelligence in academic performance and deviant behavior at school. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 63, 122-127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.05.039>
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 9(3), 185-211. <https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG>
- Smith, A. L., Bruce, C., & White, J. L. (2023). Emotional intelligence and psychological resilience in residential care: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 52(8), 1620-1632. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01587-w>
- Whetten, K. (2020). Quality of care and child development in orphanages: A global perspective. *Child Development Perspectives*, 14(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12357>