

The role of Emotional Intelligence as the determinant of personality contribution as authentic happiness among children

Hari Krishnan

Faculty of Education and Human Development
Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

Abstract

The objective of this research was to evaluate the relationship between the personality and the authentic happiness among children and the role of emotional intelligence as the moderating factor in the relationship. In this research, there is a total of children (N=200) randomly selected from primary schools in Malaysia and the instruments of this research was AU on the authentic happiness, the WLEIS for the emotional intelligence scales and the NEO Five-Factor Inventory for personality. From the research, it was concluded that authentic happiness is significantly correlated with personality factors and emotional intelligence. In addition, emotional intelligence moderated the relationship between personality and authentic happiness. The implications for child psychology and exploratory data give a fundamental background for further research.

Keywords: Personality, children, emotional intelligence, authentic happiness.

1.0 Introduction

Children's experience and expression of feelings develop tremendously during the early years of life (Dowling, 2005). Their developments are in different perspectives including social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural (Aggarwal, 1998; Lerner & Galambos, 1998). According to Bandura (1992), children start to develop various perspective such as emotions, self-perceptions, self-identity and sex-role identity (Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Children coupled with these problems are the multifarious needs (biogenic, physiogenic, psychogenic, and sociogenic) that adolescents have to satisfy. These problems usually culminate in heightened emotionality among adolescents. These emotional tensions are not developed with a moment of development of life, they are a series of process and develop through social learning and environment adaptation (Bandura, 1992).

Birth to Three Matters reminds us that babies are primed to be social and to communicate and develop their emotion and happiness (David *et al.*, 203). Within a very short period of time babies are 'reading' eye contacts, facial and body gestures and the tone of voice of those significant people who care for them. But we cannot help but notice that some babies and toddlers are particularly keen to interact. The small individuals who have already had their early attempts at conversations valued; they quickly learn that what they do and the sounds they make are of interest to adults, and they want more of this affirming experience. The adult's task is to tune into the baby's intentions and efforts and maintain this social dialogue.

In order to express their emotion, babies, young children and indeed all of us need to have someone to communicate with. Piaget (1932), (an educational giant in his time) encouraged us to believe that the very young child was a little scientist the role of the practitioner was simply to provide interesting and stimulating resources and then observe the child as he freely interacts with them. This belief led

to marginalising the adult's work. Further study has emphasised that all of us, children and adults, grow up and learn more with others. As a result, practitioners have an important responsibility to pave the way for young children to reach out and communicate with a widening circle.

Social relationships with peers develop very early out of the family. Babies will respond to other babies. Elfer, *et al.*, (2005) have shown in their studies that children from a few weeks old are able to use sound, gazes and touches (later they exchange objects) to develop loyalties and attachments to other children in their group. From this very early start, other children continue to be important. Toddlers already show considerable interest in what people do. They tune in to how adults react to different situations and use these reactions as a point of reference for their own behaviour. All parents and caregivers will have experienced a toddler's delight when she is praised for an activity or their knowing look when the adult says 'no'. By three years friendships start to become important, although at this stage they are transitory. The development of relationships has always been a fundamental part of early childhood education. Young children are recognised not just as individuals but as part of their family. Practitioners recognise that the development of close links between the home and the nursery is above all else in the interests of the child. Depending on their family experiences, children will also have learned a great deal already about getting on with people. They may be used to warm loving relationships within the family and have had many and varied chances to meet a wide circle of different adults and children. Other children may have been sheltered from social contacts, been reared in a cultrate of privacy, or may live in geographically isolated areas with no other young families nearby. Parents are usually keen for their children to spread their social wings; for most parents, an important reason for sending their child to a nursery is to help them to mix with other people, which they recognise as a key factor in living a happy and successful life.

Whatever social experiences young children have had prior to coming to an early years setting, it is likely that many relationships will have been established since babyhood and will have developed with the support of parents. The process of moving into a new environment and facing often a completely unknown group of children and adults is a challenge for any child. For those who have experienced only a small social circle of contacts at home the experience can be daunting. The vast majority of children now have some early experience in a nursery setting, but for the few who make a direct transition from home to a reception class in a mainstream school, this is probably the most challenging move for a child during her school career. In Pollard's (1996) study of five children who started school very shortly after their fourth birthday, the children's parents provided constant emotional, practical and intellectual support in the early days of school. Pollard (1996) emphasises the vital role that parents and carers play as the reference point and interpreter for their children as they move into a wider social context.

It is important to children to overcome with their emotion due to different stressors. The method how do children deal with their emotion is mainly due to the exposure and individual personality. These personality are directly influence their well-being and happiness. (AU; Aggarwal, 1998; Morris & Maisto, 2008). Hence, personality development among children is very essential to determine the happiness level among children (McCrae & Costa, 1991). Currently, the personality of children can be assessed through different method and style. The most common method can be obtained through the five-factor model (FFM). Unfortunately, the conception framework of this evaluation in AU is not well understood (Code & Langan-Fox, 2001). As the result, there is a need to study the relationship between personality and AU of children.

There are many researches were conducted to evaluate the link between affects, happiness, well being and children attitude. (Costa & McCrae, 1984; Emmons & Diener, 1985; Izard, *et al.*, 1993; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991). However, all these research didn't focus and didn't give clear direction of the model, empirical, personality and concept of happiness. (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997; Tellegen, 1985). In most of the research, happiness was predefined as the main core of personality development and

structure. In a research, the operation definition of happiness was categorised as the positive regards of emotion among respondent (Diener, 1984). In the research, items on happiness inventory and also personality were always associated with the emotion and the frequency of attachment. The concept of overlapping between the theoretical and methodology was identified through research (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). From the research, the finding shows there is a significant contribution of individual predisposition toward happiness. It is essential to understand the role of personality that affects the happiness and mental health of children. From the research, we found that it is essential to understand the concept of happiness and the research does not cover the relevant theory about the nature of human development and positive development of human being (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997).

1.1 Psychological Happiness

In order to evaluate the emotional and cognitive elements, AU is a multidimensional construct that contributes to the best assessment. A more classical research pre-defines happiness as the positive regards that contribute to negative affects. (Bradburn, 1969). From the research, he found that the respondent with higher on positive affect than on negative affect would score high on AU and vice versa. However, the more recent research found that the life satisfaction contribute to happiness (Diener et al., 1985). Besides, Pavot, et al., (1997) identified that the experience of subjective happiness can be subcategorised as the presence of positive affect and the negative affect and the cognitive element of satisfaction with life are not found there.

There are several studies focuses on the area of psychopathology and the optimal AU (Bar-On, 2005; Huppert, et al., 2004). A more fundamental research was conducted by Ryff (1989) that conclude that the alternative of multidimensional model of AU. In the research, AU scales was stream into six conceptually distinct domain of psychological functioning (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). These constructs is known as positive mental health which includes (a) self-acceptance, the capacity to see and accept our strengths and weaknesses; (b) personal growth, realizing our talents and potential over time; (c) positive relations with others; (d) autonomy; (e) environmental mastery; and (f) finding purpose in life by having goals and objectives that give life meaning and direction. Happiness is also being described as the life well and stresses free (Huppert et al., 2004).

1.2 Personality and Happiness

Personality draws the fundamental guild of human attitude and behaviour. The attitude gives the concept of favourable and unfavourable towards an action. Behaviour concept can be specified into time, frequency, space. Schmutte and Ryff (1997) provide the clear definition of personality traits. In the research, they describe personality traits as the elements towards trend of thought, mind and behaviour in different dimensions such as both good and the bad traits. The research does not only focus on adult but the extension of research on AU among children (McCrae & Costa, 1991). Abbott et al. (2008); Chico (2006); Sumer et al. (2005) have done research focusing on the personality factors to extraversion and neuroticism that contribute to another new extension to link psychopathology concept to personality. These concepts help of development of happiness and also personality development. DeNeve and Cooper (1998) conducted a meta-analysis on the relationship between personality and the two dimensions of subjective well-being. From the research, he concluded that the positive affect, negative affect, and the balance between them as the affective dimension and satisfaction with life as and the cognitive dimension all these researches have looked into the depth elements of happiness. All these research are more towards the satisfaction of life as the indicators of happiness. However, the concept of satisfaction of life is very unclear because it can pre-define as various concept and areas to investigation.

Generally, research always relate the Big Five personality factors to the concept of neuroticism (N), extraversion (E), openness to experience (OE), agreeableness (A), and conscientiousness (C) especially when investigate through AU. However, Schmutte and Ryff (1997) tried to omit these possibilities by indicating six AU variables. After factor analysis was conducted, he defined the happiness concept and personality into self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy and positive relations. In this research, Self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and purpose in life were linked with N, E, and C; personal growth was linked with OE and also to E; positive relations with others was linked with A and E; autonomy was linked with N. Another similar research was conducted by McCrae and Costa (1991) who concluded that agreeableness and conscientiousness are always be the moderating variables of social achievement, happiness and well-being. Similarly, extraversion and neuroticism are always interrelated when evaluating in term of AU. These interrelationship are significant (McCrae and Costa, 2002; McCrae, 2002). However, González, *et al.*, (2005) reported that openness to experience contribute to more positive regards and eliminate negative regards to the personality. In another words, experience contribute would directly influence the happiness of individual even at different culture and setting.

1.3 Factors Influencing Emotional Intelligence

There are not many researches to evaluate the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI), personality and AU. Salovey & Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence as the ability to express one-self accurately and the ability to understand and read other emotions. Besides, the definition extended to the ability to control own emotions and the ability to influence others in order to achieve our own goals. From Schmutte and Ryff (1997), the ability of emotional intelligence are evaluate in six major dimensions which includes self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Children with high emotional emotion are believed to demonstrate high self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Besides, several research focus on emotional intelligence with other elements of AU respectively are life satisfaction (Adeyemo & Adeleye, 2008); quality of interpersonal relationships (Bar-On, 2005; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Although many research focus on different areas of emotional intelligence, it is a need to study on the relationship between personality and facets of AU.

This research is guided with the hypotheses as the direction to evaluate the relationship between the personality and the authentic happiness among children and the role of emotional intelligence as the moderating factor in the relationship. The following hypotheses were proposed, in accordance with theoretical and empirical evidence

H1: The Big Five personality factors of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness will be significantly related to happiness.

H2: Emotional intelligence will be significantly related to happiness.

H3: Emotional intelligence will moderate the relationship between each of the personality factors and happiness such that students with high scores on each of the personality factors and high scores on emotional intelligence will higher level of happiness

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The cross sectional survey research is conducted with the assistant of an ex post facto type was used. Survey questionnaires were used to obtain data from the respondents.

2.2 Participants

The sample comprised 200 primary school children (male = 110, 55%, female = 90, 45%) randomly selected from 10 primary schools in five states in West Malaysia at a rate of two schools per state. A total of 25 students were randomly selected from each school, giving a total of 250 participants. Questionnaires were filled in by all 250 students and of this number, 200 questionnaires were used for analysis. The remaining 50 could not be used because they were incomplete. The mean age of the participants was 11.43 years ($SD = 1.65$) and the age range was 10-12 years. The survey was taken from sample aged 10 and above so that they are able to comprehend the questionnaires. Besides, McNeal (2000) identified that children develop emotional intelligence actively.

2.3 Measures

Personality: This domain is evaluated with the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This research tool with the strength to evaluate the five personality dimensions by using, a 12-item scales. However, the revised scales are used (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992) because this inventory is able to evaluate the five personality development neuroticism (N), extraversion (E), openness to experience (OE), agreeableness (A), and conscientiousness (C). To enable the research skills more effective, the measure was adopted with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Reliability test was conducted to test on the modified instruments. From the research tools, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.76, 0.69, 0.81, 0.72, and 0.75, respectively, for the N, E, OE, A, and C scales. This is consistent with the reliability test by Costa and McCrae for respectively, for the N, E, OE, A, and C scales should be between 0.70 to 0.87.

Emotional intelligence: The emotional intelligence in this research was adopted from the EI scales developed by the Wong and Law EI scale (WLEIS; Law, Wong, & Song, 2004). This research instrument with 16 items and sub-divided into four subscales. The sub scales are self-emotional appraisal (SEA), others' emotional appraisal (OEA), use of emotions (UOE), and regulation of emotions (ROE). These sub scales are measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. From the research, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the four subscales ranged from 0.76 to 0.82 which satisfies the reliability requirement of .60. According to Wong & Song (2004), the validity of the scale has been reported by Law et al. and the internal reliability coefficient of WLEIS with 0.72.

Authentic Happiness: Authentic happiness is evaluated with AU that is able to evaluate the well-being of the children. There is a 42-item scale in AU that evaluate the happiness of children that include autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, personal growth, and self acceptance (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Since the subjects are children, operation definition of each domain is developed in order to understand the concept and measurements. As the result, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with 42 self-descriptive statements based on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree* and there are twenty items were reverse coded. From the analysis, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale was 0.82. Higher scores indicate greater AU.

2.4 Procedure

An in depth interview to assist candidates to complete the survey in primary schools. Before the research is conducted, Ministry of Education of Malaysia is obtained and parents' consent to conduct the research was obtained. During in-depth interview, children would be explained and assisted with the definition of the measurement. The objective of the research was informed to the subjects when the questionnaires were completed.

2.5 Data Analysis

Social demography was analysed to understand the trend of the data. Age and gender is controlled as the effect of demographic influence as the variable. Then, the data was analysed with correlation to evaluate the inter correlation of variables in the research. According to Aiken and West (1991), hierarchical regression analyses were analysed to evaluate the moderating impact of EI on the relationship between personality and AU. The analysis starts by controlling the demographic variables especially the dependent variable. Then, EI and personality would be evaluated and at the final stage, the cross product terms of personality are evaluated.

3.0 Results

From data analysis, the results shows the age and gender did not have a significant connection with AU. N ($r = -0.27, p < 0.05$) had a negative correlation with AU. E ($r = 0.42, p < 0.05$), OE ($r = 0.31, p < 0.05$), A ($r = 0.29, p < 0.05$), C ($r = 0.29, p < 0.05$), and EI ($r = 0.28, p < 0.05$) had positive correlations with AU. Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported.

Table 1

MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATION, AND INTERCORRELATIONS OF ALL VARIABLES

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Gender	1.00								
Age	0.06	1.00							
Neuroticism	0.07	0.07	1.00						
Extraversion	0.06	0.07	0.05	1.00					
Openness to experience	0.14	0.09	0.06	0.27*	1.00				
Agreeable	0.12	0.12	0.09	0.24*	0.26*	1.00	1.00		
Conscientiousness	0.16	0.05	0.24*	0.05	0.07	0.18	0.16*		
EI	0.13	0.05	0.04	0.09	0.06	0.06	0.05	1.00	
AU			-.27*	0.42*	0.31*	0.29*	0.29*	0.28*	1.00
M	-	13.14	19.63	28.42	30.21	29.71	31.72	29.42	31.52
SD	-	1.23	1.23	2.03	2.72	2.82	3.16	3.82	2.97

Notes: EI = emotional intelligence, AU = authentic happiness, N = 200, * = $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed test).

In hypothesis 3, significant interactions were posited between each of the personality factors, and EI to predict AU. As indicated in Table 2, in step 3, the interaction terms between EI and each of the personality factors altogether made a significant contribution to the prediction of AU ($R^2 = 0.42, \Delta R^2 = 0.06, \Delta F(4, 273) = 4.87, p < 0.05$). The interaction of N x EI ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.05$) and E x EI ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.05$) made a significant contribution to the prediction of AU. Adolescents who scored high in N and E but who had greater EI had higher scores for AU than did those with lower scores for EI.

Table 2
HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSES PREDICTING PSYCHOLOGICAL HAPPINESS FROM PERSONALITY AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Predictors	R ²	ΔR ²	ΔF	df	β	t
Step 1						
Demographic factors	0.03	0.03	1.92	2, 345		
Gender					0.02	0.48
Age					0.06	0.61
Step 2	0.26	0.32	10.64*	6, 387		
EI					0.19*	2.76*
Neuroticism					-0.32*	-4.02*
Extraversion					0.32*	3.62*
Openness to experience					0.38*	3.76*
Agreeableness					0.28*	3.65*
Conscientiousness					0.42*	4.27*
Step 3	0.42	0.06	4.87*	4, 273		
Interaction terms					0.23*	4.82*
NxEI					0.24*	3.97*
ExEI					0.18	1.47
OExEI					0.07	1.21
AxEI					0.05	1.12
CxEI						

Note: N = neuroticism, E = extraversion, OE = openness to experience, A = agreeableness, C = conscientiousness, EI = emotional intelligence, N = 200. * = p < 0.05 (two-tailed tests).

However, interactions of OE x EI, A x EI, and C x EI did not make a significant contribution to the prediction of AU. Regardless of their score for EI, adolescents who had high scores for OE, C, and A had higher scores for AU. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was partly supported.

4.0 Discussion

From the data analysis, there is a significant correlation between the Big Five personality factors and happiness (AU). These findings are consistent with research conducted where the personality provides instrumental avenues through which different aspects of well-being are achieved (Abbott et al., 2008; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Gutiérrez et al., 2005; McCrae, 2002; McCrae & Costa, 1991; Schmutte & Ryff, 1997; Sumer et al., 2005). From the findings, we understand that children with high in OE and E have tendency to have self understanding and achieve own happiness with enjoying self-growth. For this group of children, they would feel happy when they have achieved something in their life. In contrast, children with high A are more likely to be demonstrating high level of trust, good-natured and taking good care of them because they feel they are always supported by people around them. Children with high N have high self-control, self-determination and competence. The satisfaction and happiness are achieved when they feel they have achieved high self-control, self-determination and competence. On the other hand, children with high value of C achieve happiness when they have achieved high control and competence by feeling of responsible behaviour.

Adeyemo & Adeleye (2008); Bar-On, (2005); Salovey & Mayer (1990) findings are consistent with the research findings where EI is related to AU. However, in this research, AU is related to happiness among children. Form this findings, children with EI has six dimensions of happiness that was operationalized by AU. Abbott et al. (2008) supports the conclusion made that EI moderates the relationship between N and E with the presence of happiness (AU). However, the findings does not

shows moderating effects between EI and OE, A, C. As the result, the conclusion draws was the limit of N that generates the positive effects of E that contribute to AU. Similarly, OE, A, and C are able to boost the effect of EI and AU. The implication of this result was that the clinical psychology needs to take consideration of the personality factor when evaluating EI when dealing with children personality, emotion, social and personal problems.

The strength and weaknesses of children can be determined through understanding the concept of EI among children. By considering children EI, the psychologists are able to identify their emotional strength and continue to develop strategies to enhance the weaknesses. For instance, psychologist can design the right intervention strategies to educate children and their parents on how to evaluate and boost their EI. The right problem solving exercise, the cognitive behavioural modification techniques, self confident, self-efficacy, socialization processes are able to increase the happiness among children. At the same time, children should be trained on the techniques on stress management and problem solving in order to achieve authentic happiness. However, the limitation of this research on the instruments of the questionnaire because the cognitive development among children could be varies between respondents. Besides in-depth interview, the research can be enhanced with experimental studies where children are put in certain situation to evaluate each domain of personality that was adopted. The present research concluded that personality factors contribute to happiness among children.

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