STUDENTS' INTENTION TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY: THE MODERATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a crucial role in the foundation of a civilised society. A thriving civilisation prioritises the development of its future leaders, nurturing them to embrace compassion and open-mindedness while instilling an appreciation for history and the pursuit of a brighter future. An individual's worldview is fundamentally altered through education, which increases their tolerance. Nevertheless, when we talk about sustainability, it goes beyond education. Thus, the objective of this cross-sectional study is to identify the potential influence of students' beliefs and attitudes on their intention towards sustainability. The research examines the relationship between emotional intelligence and sustainability, as well as the interplay between these variables. A survey was carried out on a sample of 196 students from the Commerce department, Politeknik Muadzam Shah, Pahang. To collect the data, a 26-item questionnaire was created. Using SPSS (Statistical Package for The Social Sciences), data were gathered and descriptively examined. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence has a direct impact and could be an important factor as moderator variable to increase their intention to practise sustainability. Furthermore, in order to build a more sustainable future for all, it was recommended to foster emotional intelligence in individuals.

Keywords: belief, attitude, intention, emotional intelligence, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Principles of sustainable development were thought to be best communicated through the field of education, specifically to start earlier at a young age. Related to that, educators and universities play a major role in encouraging students towards sustainability. The goal of sustainability is to promote harmony among people, and between people and nature, which includes a balance of economic, social and environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, according to Olawumi and Chan (2018), the terms sustainability and sustainable development are frequently utilised interchangeably, implying their close association. When we discussed sustainability, it refers to the balance of economic, social and environmental worldwide. The inspiration for sustainable development stems from the United Nations' 17 goals established in 2023. Serving as a roadmap, the Sustainable Development Goals provide a framework to achieve a more equitable and sustainable future for all individuals. These goals encompass a wide range of global challenges, such as environmental degradation, climate change, poverty, inequality and the pursuit of peace. By attaining all of these goals by 2030, we can strive to leave no one behind. Traits such as the drive for success, dedication, initiative and optimism are closely associated with this competency. However, many citizens did not realise the importance of sustainability, especially towards civilisation. The best medium to improve is through education. Taking into consideration, before we educate the younger generation about sustainability, we need to learn about their own perception and understanding about sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability development is related to the civilisation of human beings. In civilisation, people are morally upright, work closely

together and lead distinctive lives. Thus, sustainability will be achieved and contribute to the balance of social and environment. A constant evaluation of consumer attitudes towards involvement in sustainable consumption is necessary as corporate sustainability programs are more emphasised globally and more items connected to sustainability are offered. There is also a need to ascertain whether certain consumer traits may indicate how they feel about sustainability projects and respond in those situations. A shift in one's feelings towards concerns pertaining to the environment, society or economy is referred to as an attitude change towards sustainable development. It focuses on cultivating empathy and compassion for all life, including humans and all living things, that exists on the planet earth.

Accordingly, achieving sustainability is not feasible without the involvement of the young generation, because they are our future. Tang (2018) highlighted the crucial role that universities and educators should undertake in fostering values, beliefs and unwavering commitment to sustainability. It is recognised that education encompasses far-reaching advantages that extend beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills. As a result, it will shape their attitudes towards sustainability development. Attitudes can be differentiated into two elements, which are explicit and implicit attitudes. Even though people can report and deliberately regulate explicit attitudes, implicit attitudes are those that people do not explicitly recognise and whose activation is uncontrollable. Previous studies in the subject of sustainability have shown that implicit and explicit attitudes are not always related, showing a low congruence between explicit and implicit sustainability orientations. (Steiner et al., 2018). Students' attitudes towards sustainability are crucial as it will influence their behaviour when it comes to the early stages of sustainability development, which involve product selection and daily usage.

Wyer (2018) asserted that beliefs represent an individual's perception of truth, and are integral to the development of one's values and convictions. These beliefs are susceptible to modification through the acquisition of knowledge. A person's perspective is profoundly altered by education, which also makes

them more tolerant, skeptical, and less prone to be duped by populist charlatans and other outmoded ideas that have long impeded humanity's progress. In line with the statement by another researcher, increasing knowledge could influence one's beliefs, values and intentions (Perloff, 2017). When it comes to the intention, we need to prioritise our goals and mission to make sustainable development successful. The preferences involved in making it success include changes of lifestyle for better sustainability, socially and environmentally responsible, and wise decision when it comes to deciding. Goal intention, personal standards and attitudes are crucial to move on to the next phase and, ultimately, for engaging in sustainable behaviour (Richter & Hunecke, 2020).

A person's capacity to control their emotions and express them in a way that is appropriate and productive is known as emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2017), otherwise known as "the individual's ability to use reason to understand and deal with emotions (own and others), and use emotions to understand the context and make more rational decisions" (Salovey, 2019). Emotional intelligence essentially has a direct and beneficial influence on people since it can inspire people to develop a variety of abilities, competencies and skills that affect one's capacity to successfully manage environmental demands and pressures. As stated by Encinas and Chauca (2020), the development of emotional intelligence may be crucial to understand sustainable development. Other attributes include social skills, self-control, motivation, empathy and self-awareness. This component is crucial to learn about contemporary economic, social and environmental challenges, and how to act for greater sustainability. Consistent with the findings reported by Tsalaporta (2021), there exists a correlation between emotional intelligence and sustainable development. Furthermore, this study has the potential to investigate potential differences in emotional intelligence levels between males and females. As noted by Magano (2020), emotional intelligence could be considered a trait, as the emotional profiles of students may vary, depending on their gender and age.

Beyond that, positive competency also encourages someone to be internally motivated to accomplish their goals or objectives (Jack, 2017). As a result of learning something new or doing something new, they feel satisfied since they are inwardly motivated and enjoy discovering new things.

METHODOLOGY

Regarding the identification of the relationship between attitude and belief towards intention of sustainability, the questionnaire that consists of 26 structured question was developed. The sampling method used in this research was purposive sampling. The target population of this study was all the students who are currently taking Diploma in Business Studies in Politeknik Muadzam Shah, Pahang, Malaysia, which involves 400 students. However, referring to the sample size table established by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the recommended sample size has been narrowed down to approximately 196 participants. The questionnaire used was adopted from previous research, consisting of four sections, with Section A focusing on gathering demographic information such as age and gender. Other sections include the questions about attitude (six items), belief (six items), intention (six items) towards sustainability and emotional intelligence (six items) as moderating variable towards the intention of sustainability. Five-point Likert scales (1 = "strongly disagree," 5 = "strongly agree") were used to measure these factors. The data were analysed with SPSS 27 to statistically test the validity and reliability of the scale. Descriptive analysis (means and standard deviations) was used to characterise the sample. By calculating the skewness and kurtosis indicators, the distribution of the items was assessed for normality; skewness values under 3 and kurtosis values under 10 are indicative of normality. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to rate the reliability of the construct. The PROCESS macro for SPSS was then used to test the hypothesis that emotional intelligence would operate as a moderator in the interaction between beliefs, attitudes and actions towards sustainability.

For the research questionnaire, we adopt the questions or items from another researcher, which is from Nogueira, T. et. al., (2023). The differences between our focus are their research focus on how to develop and practise sustainability through engineering sustainability subject in their university, while we choose to acquire the data from our respondent, which is students who are currently taking Diploma in Business Studies. Table 2.1 below presents the reliability test for our research questionnaire.

Table 2.1: Reliability Test

Construct	**Cronbach Alpha**
Belief	0.910
Attitude	0.940
Intention	0.928
Emotional Intelligence	0.900

Table 2.1's findings demonstrate that each construct's Cronbach Alpha value was greater than 0.7, demonstrating the strong reliability of our survey instrument. As stated by Chan and Idris (2017), Cronbach's alpha was presented to show the internal consistency of each questionnaire, where an $\alpha > 0.7$ suggests good reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistics for the items on the study's measures, which include beliefs, attitudes, intentions and emotional intelligence, are shown in Table 2.2. Table 2.2 presents the descriptive statistics for the items measuring belief, attitudes, intentions, and emotional intelligence in the utilised instruments for this study. The distribution of data is considered normal, as indicated by the skewness and kurtosis values falling within the acceptable range. The mean value can give the researchers a good idea on how the respondents in the research have reacted to the variables in the questionnaire. Olatunde, Eyiolorunnse and Ogunode (2021) stated that means with values of 2.50 or higher

were regarded as agreed, accepted or positive responses, whilst those with values lower than 2.50 were viewed as negative and unaccepted/disagreed responses. The findings showed that intentions towards sustainability are directly impacted by attitudes and beliefs about sustainability in a statistically significant way.

Table 2.2: Item Frequencies

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
I feel more obliged to do something about environmental problems	4.0357	0.88506	-0.608	-0.190
I feel more morally obliged to do something about social problems	4.0051	0.87996	-0.557	-0.008
I think I should take more responsibility for sustainable development	4.0306	0.81592	-0.686	0.749
I believe that humans have the right to subdue and control nature	4.0000	0.88868	-0.709	0.498
I believe that human should adapt to nature rather than modify it to suit them	4.0255	0.88542	-0.722	0.518
I think it is important to control human population to ensure social sustainability	3.9745	0.92507	-0.813	0.663
I am more aware of current environmental, social, economic and cultural issues	4.2041	0.86480	-0.793	-0.040
I am more concerned about environmental pollutions	4.2704	0.79958	-0.710	-0.524
I try to use green products and services whenever possible	4.1990	0.85707	-0.741	-0.142
I refuse the use of packaging	4.0561	0.99327	-0.811	0.125
I set aside garbage for reuse, recycling or safe disposal	4.1020	0.91696	-0.809	0.371
I try to use energy and resources more efficiently	4.2194	0.84601	-0.692	-0.329

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
I prefer to work for an environmentally responsible employer in the future	4.1582	0.85963	-0.947	0.873
I prefer to work for socially responsible employer in the future	4.1378	0.83905	-0.844	0.777
I intend to change/continue to change my lifestyle for better sustainability	4.1429	0.79097	-0.574	0.011
I will promote the concept of sustainable development to my family and friends	4.1020	0.75773	-0.601	0.540
I will participate in campaign/causes that promote sustainable development	4.1276	0.75723	-0.575	0.373
I will apply the concept of triple bottom line more in making decision	4.1224	0.78139	-0.544	0.071
When a friend of mine wins an award, I feel happy for him	4.2908	0.81153	-1.046	0.903
I react calmly when I am under stress	4.1071	0.94665	-1.022	0.883
Am I really able to control my own emotions?	4.0561	0.84848	-0.616	0.001
I do my best to achieve the goals I set for myself	4.2959	0.74709	-0.916	1.003
I can understand my friends' emotions and feeling by seeing their behaviour	4.2194	0.78957	-0.853	0.690
I strive to understand other people's points of view	4.2398	0.72228	-0.810	1.184

Source: Nogueira, T et al. (2023)

Table 2. 3: Moderation Analysis

Construct	p	ΔR^2	t	F
Belief	0.7030	0.8%	-1.8025	3.2489
Attitude	0.0307	1.05%	-2.1768	4.7387

Using PROCESS v4.2 developed by Andrew F. Hayes, a moderation analysis was conducted to examine the impact of emotional intelligence on the relationship between attitudes, beliefs and intentions towards sustainability. In this analysis, attitudes were specified as the independent variable, intentions towards sustainability as the dependent variable and emotional intelligence as the moderating variable. Based on Table 2.3, the result found that attitudes are significant and negatively moderate the relationship (95% confidence interval, p = 0.0307 which is less than 0.05). R-square change is 1.05% and t-test is -2.1768. Similarly, the results show that emotional intelligence has a negative and not statistically significant moderating effect on the connection between belief and intention to preserve one's lifestyle. (95% confidence interval, p = 0.730). As stated by Kim (2022), p-value that is less than 0.05 is considered significant while p-value that is more than 0.05 is considered not significant.

CONCLUSION

The result indicates that both attitudes and belief have significant relationship with the intention towards sustainability. However, emotional intelligence is significant, and negatively moderates the relationship between attitude and intention while belief does not. It is well known that it enables people to form solid relationships with others, to be more adaptable and resilient, and to approach sustainability with an open mind. Taking into consideration, they will approach sustainability issues more actively. The ultimate objective is to develop emotional intelligence in people to advance civilisation and create a more sustainable future for all.

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