Emotional Intelligence Revisited: The Questions of Level, Affective Factors and Academic Performance among Generation Z in Malaysia

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Abstract: Research has posited that emotional intelligence (EQ) plays a crucial role in a learner's educational success and is deemed more superior than intelligent Quotient (IQ) in predicting academic achievement. Previous studies indicate an EQ deficiency within the average Generation Z (Gen Z) world view. Within the educational systems, primary focus tends to be directed to the students' cognitive aspects, with less attention on exploring the relationship between emotions and the learning process. This study aimed to address this gap by identifying the EQ levels, factors affecting the EQ levels, and the relationship between EQ and Gen Z academic performance. The study employed a non-experimental quantitative design utilising descriptive and interpretive approach. The participants were 122 Gen Z undergraduates, from a public university in Malaysia. USMEQ-i (Universiti Sains Malaysia EQ inventory) was utilised to obtain the respondents' EQ levels. The research findings indicate that the participants can be characterised as having a "low high" level of EQ scoring a mean of 2.81, attributed to four affective factors: Emotional Expression, Emotional Conscientiousness, Emotional Maturity, and Emotional Awareness. The findings also reveal no statistically significant correlation between EQ and academic performance. The study concludes the importance of recognising emotional intelligence as a multifaceted construct that influences various aspects of Gen Z students' educational development and maturation. This study holds significant implications for new learning delivery methods, which are further elaborated in the paper.

Keywords: Academic performance, Affective factors, Emotional intelligence, EQ, Generation Z

1.   Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to recognise, express, comprehend, motivate, influence, and regulate emotions. EQ is an impactful factor to a learner's educational success, and, in fact, it is deemed more superior than intelligent Quotient (IQ) in predicting a student's academic success (Arias, Soto-Carballo, & Pino-Juste, 2022; Ononye et al., 2022; Qualter et al., 2009; Venkteshwar & Warrier, 2022). It has been validly measured as a predictor of significant outcomes for social relations, workplace performance, and mental and physical well-being (Bresman & Rao, 2017; Cowan, 2014; Csobanka, 2016; Twenge, 2017).

However, EQ is perceived to be lacking in the average Generation Z (Gen Z)'s worldview as their traits and belief systems are different to the characteristics of previous generations. Although Gen Z are known by their positive attributes that are technologically competent, achievement focused, confident, team-oriented and multi-taskers (Holt, Marques & Wray, 2012, Johanson, 2012, Venne & Coleman, 2010), they have also been identified with less positive characteristics like feeling pressured, feeling special, as well as lacking of professional boundaries influenced by socialisation, a need to have immediate feedback, a sense of entitlement, lacking critical thinking skills, unrealistic expectation, high level of parental involvement and being sheltered, and an expected "how to" guide to succeed in and out of the classroom (Cowan, 2014; Csobanka, 2016; Monaco & Martin, 2007; Turner, 2015; Twenge, 2017;).

Since the change of era has given different psychological states of Gen Z, the questions of their EQ and the affective factors may be worth revisiting as this generation is adjusting to non-customary qualities, perspectives, and expectations of the other generations. According to Goleman (1995; 1998) Intelligence Quotient (IQ) only contributes about 20% to success in life, people also need emotional competence to get the full potential of their talents. For Gen Z, having an insight about their own EQ dimensions may help them choose a more rewarding career, job, task, or profession, as well as provide a deeper understanding of themselves. For education providers, insights into the level of EQ and the affective factors and the role they play in academic performance can assist them in helping the Gen Z make the right choices that are complemented by their strengths. As the skills that make up EQ can be learned, educators may offer some objective intervention programmes that can address Gen Z's weaknesses contributing to their personal growth and development.

This preliminary study aims to explore how EQ may influence the academic performance of Gen Z. Emotional competence plays a significant role in personal and academic success, making it essential to investigate how EQ dynamics relate to the educational achievements of this generation. This can be expressed by the following research questions: (1) What is the EQ level of Gen Z in Malaysia?, (2) What are the affective factors of the EQ among Gen Z?; (3) Is there any relationship between the dimensions of EQ and academic performance of Gen Z?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Generation Z

There is no consensus on the exact age range for Generation Z (Gen Z). There are numerous literatures citing the translation of the term; for instance, Turner (2013) states the time frame of birth for Gen Z are from 1993 to 2005 while Lanier (2017) categorises those who were born after 1995 as Gen Z. Singh and Dangmei (2016) propose that this generation comprises individuals who were born in the 1990s and raised in the 2000s. Growing up, they live in a world with the internet, smart phones, laptops and freely accessible networks. It is also the period during which the world saw the most significant developments in the digital world of the century. This generation is known as the 'Online Generation', 'Digital Natives', 'Gen Tech' or 'iGen' as the social web and digital technology have always been a part of their upbringing and identity (Lanier, 2017; Tjiptono et al., 2020; Turner, 2013; Twenge, 2017).

As they grow up alongside the advancement of digital technology and the Internet, Gen Z are adept users of digital technology. They see that both worlds are complementary, making many of them efficient in both real and virtual worlds (Dolot, 2018). Lanier (2017) labels them as the true digital native, stemming from their upbringing in the digital-eccentric world. They were exposed to digital technology from an early age and proficient users of digital tools and active participants in the online social network, resulting in prevailing perception that they are highly dependent on technology (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Tjiptono et al. (2020) in their study on Gen Z in Malaysia refer to them as the 4E generation: Electronically Engaged, Educated, Entrepreneurial and Empowered. According to the researchers, Gen Z in Malaysia like their international counterparts, possess high adaptability to technology and are often referred to as digital natives with 99% smartphone ownership and a lifelong connection to the Internet and digital technologies (Ong, 2015). They also value

education and are keen on acquiring higher education as they have a strong belief of its importance in securing a successful life. They are also reported to be highly drawn to entrepreneurship motivated by the belief that they can earn more as entrepreneurs than as traditional employees. Shaped by their experiences with the political shifts of the country, Gen Z is advocating for political reform, free expression, transparent governance, and equitable policies (Tjiptono et al., 2020).

In terms of their professional careers, Gen Z appreciates having a work-life balance that enables individuals to schedule time for both their personal lives and work (AIF, 2018). A big number of them are not willing to allow their personal lives to be compromised by the commitment to work. Bresman and Rao (2017) claim that Gen Z tends to leave leadership positions or even their entire career if they notice a disconnect between their professional and personal lives. In addition, they do not value job security and are willing to switch jobs frequently in search of variety and a break from the mundane tasks.

Nevertheless, their heavy reliance on digital technology has its drawbacks. The extensive connection to social media has resulted in the generation to be known as having poor skill in physical interaction (Cowan, 2014). According to Twenge (2017), Gen Z's active engagement in online communities and social networks has exposed them to negative social interactions. This has been linked to an increased susceptibility to emotional distress or harm, which is associated with a higher risk of suicide. The author adds that Gen Z seems to exhibit more fear or apprehension toward adult social interactions than physical harm, and this could be a contributing factor to the rising levels of depression and anxiety among them (Twenge, 2017).

Cowen (2014) adds, although Gen Z is adept at using technology for acquiring and applying information to enhance their skills, their factual knowledge base remains relatively underdeveloped, and they lack information literacy. They also tend to have a shorter attention span and weaker memory due to their dependency on the internet for information (Csobanka, 2016). Their reduced exposure to face-to-face interaction also hinders the ability to develop essential social skills for in-person interactions since they are no longer being taught the intricacies of conversation and connection (Turner, 2015).

Gen Z is a diverse cohort, with varying definitions of its birth range. In this study, we define Gen Z as those born in the 1990s and raised in the 2000s, following the categorisation method proposed by Singh and Dangmei (2016). This generation is characterised by their lifelong exposure to digital technology, making them proficient in both real and virtual worlds. They are highly adaptable to technology, value education, aspire to higher education, and are drawn to entrepreneurship. However, their heavy reliance on digital technology has drawbacks, including potential challenges in physical interaction, emotional distress, and information literacy deficits.

2.2 Studies on Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is 'the ability to identify, assess and control one's own emotions, the emotion of others and that of groups' (Goleman, 1995). According to Goleman's model of EQ, there are five components of emotional intelligence: 1) self-awareness (the ability to be understand and accepting one's own thoughts and their impact on other people; 2) self-regulation (the ability to control one's actions and emotions); 3) internal motivation (having passion on what you do); 4) empathy (ability to understand and react to the emotions of others); and 5) social skills (ability to treat people politely and with respect). Goleman (1995) suggested that cognitive intelligence (IQ) only attributes 20% of a person's success. He posited that individuals with a high level of EQ will have a greater chance of being successful than those who do not. This has led to a growing body of research that examines the significance of EQ to academic achievement.

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between EQ and academic success, among them include Qualter et al. (2009) who examined the impact of the level of emotional intelligence on academic success of 465 students at an Australian university. The study found that students with greater emotional intelligence performed better academically than those with lower levels of EQ. Halimi et al. (2020) in their study involving 480 college students in Kuwait also obtained similar findings. Al-Asmari (2014) in his study on gender-based differences in emotional intelligence involving 100 male and 100 female participants in Saudi Arabia also reported a positive relationship

between emotional intelligence and academic performance. More recently, Arias, Soto-Carballo and Pino-Juste (2022) explored the level of EQ and motivation towards studying among primary school students reported that there is a positive significant correlation between high levels of EQ in all the factors (i.e., self- conscience, self-control, emotional use, empathy and social skills) and a good level of academic motivation. Implementation of programs that consolidate emotional competences to students is highly encouraged to boost their academic motivation. In the same vein, Venkteshwar and Warrier (2022) highlight how pertinent EQ is in academics. In their investigation on the relationship between EQ and academic performance of MBA students across Karnataka found that EQ has a significant influence on academic performance. This has led to a recommendation to introduce EQ as a subject for high school students, to enhance not just their academic performance but their quality of life too. Similar finding was also reported by Ononye et al. (2022) in a study participated by 179 final year undergraduate students in Nigeria. The study concluded that emotional intelligence significantly and positively influenced academic performance.

Nevertheless, studies have also reported a negative relationship between EQ and academic performance. One such study is by Chang and Tsai (2022) who explored the correlation between emotional intelligence, learning motivation, and self-efficacy on students among 450 students who underwent online English classes during the latter phase of the pandemic in China. They found that there was no significant correlation between students' EQ and their academic achievement. Similarly, the same finding was reported by Roso-Bas et al. (2015). The cross-sectional study involving 144 nursing students investigated the relationships and predictive potential of individual emotional factors, including perceived emotional intelligence, dispositional optimism/pessimism, and depressive rumination, on students' intentions to drop out and their academic performance found no significant relationship between EQ and academic performance.

In relation to language learning, a study by Maqbool (2019) among 122 Pakistani ESL learners discovered that there is a significant relationship between EQ and the level of learner's accomplishment at the graduate level. Another study conducted by Aghasafari (2006) focused on the relationship between emotional intelligence of Iranian students and their overall approach to language learning revealed that there was a positive and statistically significant association between their EQ levels and students' usage of language learning strategies.

In the Malaysian context, Noor Haslinda et al. (2018) study involving 918 primary 3 and primary 4 students discovered that academic success was closely related to six variations of emotional intelligence, namely self-confidence, self-motivation, self-regulation, self-awareness, spirituality, and empathy. The study suggests the importance of EQ and its valuable impact on academic and career success. Similarly, Nor Lailatul et al. (2020) in their study on the influence of emotional intelligence on MUET performance of 250 students from engineering and information and communication technology (ICT) in a public university in Malaysia reported positive correlation between EQ level and MUET performance. Another study by Tee et al. (2023) examined the impact of gender and fields of study on the EQ of 228 participants from a Community College in Malaysia. EQ was measured using the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (SSREI) and the results showed that there were no significant differences in EQ between genders. However, there were significant differences in EQ among students enrolled in different certificate programs. The findings suggest that Malaysian students have opportunities for enhancing their emotional intelligence, indicating a potential need for additional guidance and improved EQ among Malaysian young adults.

As attested by the literature reviewed, EQ plays a significant role in academic achievement and success, with numerous studies attesting its positive impact on student performance (e.g., Qualter et al., 2009; Halimi et al., 2020). However, contrasting findings from studies like Chang and Tsai (2022) and Roso-Bas et al. (2015) suggest no significant relationship between EQ and academic success. Studies conducted in Malaysia demonstrate the significance of EQ for academic and career success supporting the need for further research on emotional intelligence (EQ) in Malaysia. This research can offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and students in Malaysia on the essential role of EQ in academic and career achievements, while also addressing the research gap that existed due to the lack of studies in Malaysia conducted on this aspect.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative design, employing the non-experimental, descriptive and interpretive approach. It involved the Gen Z undergraduates who were born in the 1990s and raised in the 2000s, following the categorisation proposed by Singh and Dangmei (2016).

3.1 Participants

The study utilised convenience sampling to gather 122 undergraduate participants (35 males, 87 females) from various academic programs including Applied Sciences, Plant and Agro Technology, Engineering, and Office Management. The participants aged between 19 to 21 years old at the time of the study. This method was chosen for its practicality and accessibility, providing a cross-sectional perspective on Gen Z undergraduates at the chosen institution. However, it is important to note that due to the non-probability nature of convenience sampling, findings should be interpreted with caution, as some degree of bias may be introduced into the results.

3.2 Instrument for Data Collection

A survey method of data collection was involved, using questionnaires as the research instrument. The questionnaire composed of 2 sections was used to answer the proposed research: Section A: Demographic information, and Section B: EQ Inventory. Section A gauged the respondents' demographic information which include age, gender, programme of study, academic performance, and family background. Section B, on the other hand, examined the respondents' EQ level by using the USMEQ-i (Universiti Sains Malaysia EQ inventory) developed by Yusoff et al. (2010). USMEQ-i is a valid and reliable instrument that can be used to identify students' EQ as the reliability analysis shows that the USMEQ-i has a high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficient value at 0.96 which is more than the acceptable cut-off point of 0.7 (Yusoff, 2012). USMEQ-i contains 46 items exploring seven dimensions of EQ: i) emotional control, ii) emotional maturity, iii) emotional conscientiousness, iv) emotional awareness, v) emotional commitment, vi) emotional fortitude, and vii) emotional expression. Table 1 below presents the description of the USMEQ-i domains:

Table 1. Description of USMEQ-i Domains

Domain	Description
Emotional Control	the ability of self-control from disruptive emotions and impulsive feelings.
Emotional Maturity	the ability to facilitate and guide emotional tendencies to achieve and reach intended goals.
Emotional Conscientiousness	to the ability of taking responsibility and maintaining integrity for personal performance.
Emotional Awareness	the ability of knowing and understanding one's own and other persons' internal states, preferences, resources and intuitions as well as their effects.
Emotional Commitment	the ability of aligning and working with others in a group or organisation towards common goals.
Emotional Fortitude	the ability of negotiating and resolving disagreements as well as sending convincing messages.
Emotional Expression	the ability of conveying and adjusting one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours to changing situations and conditions.

Although there are many other EQ tests/inventories available, most of them are based on the western/foreign cultures. USMEQ-i was chosen for this research as all the items were designed based on its suitability and compatibility with the local cultures and values.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using the latest version of SPSS (Version 29). The descriptive analysis was carried out for each item to answer the research questions. Mean scores were used to obtain the respondents' level of EQ. The data were categorised into high, moderate, and low as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Score and Category Level of Emotional Intelligence

Total Mean Score	Categories of Integration Level
0.00 – 1.20	Low
1.21 – 2.80	Average
2.81 – 4.00	High

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings that are sequenced according to the established research questions.

4.1 The EQ level of the Gen Z

Table 3 below summarises the results of a descriptive analysis conducted on the participants EQ level.

Table 3. EQ Level of Gen Z

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Emotional Quotient	122	1.28	4.00	2.8108	.61039	-.210	.219	-.596	.435

As can be seen in Table 3, the average EQ score for the participants in this study is 2.81, just above the 2.8 threshold for an average EQ level. This indicates that, overall, participants' EQ level tends to lean towards the lower end of the spectrum, categorising it as a "low-high" EQ level. According to Yusoff et al. (2010), a high score on the USMEQ-i assessment suggests that students possess the ability to notice, comprehend, articulate, manage, stimulate, and regulate their emotional intelligence. The findings suggest that the participants have moderately high capacity to regulate their emotions and channel them towards productive activities to enhance their study performance.

4.2 The Affective Factors of the EQ among the Gen Z

Descriptive statistics were administered to obtain the means of each USMEQ-i domain. As summarised in Table 4 below, four domains recorded above the established average threshold of 2.8; Emotional Expression, Emotional Conscientiousness, Emotional Maturity and Emotional Awareness.

Table 4. The Affective Factors of the EQ Among the Gen Z

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Factor Control	122	.89	4.00	2.4800	.71543	.082	.219	-.538	.435
Factor Maturity	122	1.13	4.00	**2.9293**	.68672	-.225	.219	-.692	.435
Factor Conscientiousness	122	.60	4.00	**2.9590**	.71764	-.680	.219	.266	.435
Factor Awareness	122	1.20	4.00	**2.8148**	.73368	-.281	.219	-.866	.435
Factor Commitment	122	.50	4.00	2.6680	.83161	-.191	.219	-.772	.435
Factor Fortitude	122	.75	4.00	2.7336	.77722	-.537	.219	-.222	.435
Factor Expression	122	1.75	4.00	**3.3484**	.55722	-.840	.219	.087	.435
Faking Index	122	.86	4.00	2.6124	.75537	-.176	.219	-.714	.435
Valid N (listwise)	122								

Emotional Expression recorded the highest mean score of 3.34 indicating very clearly a strong ability among Gen Z participants to effectively express their emotions. According to Yusoff et al. (2010), possessing a heightened degree of Emotional Expression facilitates an individual's ability to successfully respond to both their own emotions and the emotions of others. They possess adeptness in effectively portraying themselves as captivating to their audience in various situations through the utilisation of non-verbal communication (Yusoff et al., 2010). He added that individuals possessing such skill gives them an advantage, allowing them to successfully persuade and gain the favour of others.

Emotional Conscientiousness recorded the second highest mean score of 2.95. This score indicates a significant level of emotional responsibility and awareness among the Gen Z participants. This commonly refers to the capacity to assume accountability and uphold ethical standards in one's own performance (Yusoff et al., 2010). Individuals possessing this competency exhibit the ability to adopt a resolute and principled stance, especially in situations where their viewpoints may not be widely accepted or popular. In addition to being seen as trustworthy and steadfast in their adherence to values, individuals of this nature are frequently recognised for their organisational skills and meticulousness in pursuing work-related goals (Arifin et al., 2012).

Scoring a mean of 2.92 in Emotional Maturity, the Gen Z participants can be considered as having a solid level of emotional maturity. It demonstrates their capacity for responsible emotional management, particularly in the face of challenges to reaching their objectives and standards. Compared to others, they frequently have higher expectations for themselves and are prepared to put relentless efforts to achieve them (Arifin et al., 2012). They are also described as resourceful

individuals, particularly when it comes to obtaining knowledge to reduce ambiguity and identify areas for improvement.

Emotional Awareness achieved just above the average mean score of 2.81 suggesting that the participants possess a reasonable degree of emotional self-awareness. This domain is crucial for identifying and comprehending the internal states, desires, resources, and intuitions of both oneself and other people, as well as the consequences of those states (Yusoff et al., 2010). According to Goleman (2006), self-awareness facilitates cognitive processes by offering valuable insights to alleviate negative emotional states. As indicate by the mean score, the participant possess a reasonable level of emotional self-awareness, which plays a vital role in recognising and understanding both their own and others' emotions,

It is also important to highlight that the data also reveal domains that have recorded below the average threshold (m=2.8), which include Emotional Control (m=2.48), Emotional Commitment (m=2.66) and Emotional Fortitude (m=2.73). Despite possessing higher ability to express their emotion and higher level of emotional responsibility, emotional maturity and emotional awareness, the Gen Z participants have lower capacity for managing emotions effectively, a lack of wholehearted engagement with emotional experiences and a potential vulnerability in the face of emotional challenges.

4.3 The relationship between the dimensions of EQ and academic performance of the Gen Z

Before presenting and discussing the relationship between EQ and Gen Z participants' academic performance, it is important to note that academic performance in the scope of this study is based primarily on the participants' current CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average). Table 5 below summarises the mean CGPA of the participants' involved in the study.

Table 5: Mean CGPA of Gen Z Participants

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
CGPA	122	1.80	3.91	3.0108	.48004
Valid N (listwise)	122				

As summarised in Table 5 the mean CGPA recorded is 3.0 on a scale of 4.0. This translates to B average, indicating a consistently strong performance of above the average grades in the courses enrolled by the participants.

Pearson correlation coefficient analysis was administered to obtain the *r*-value of EQ and participants' CGPA. Table 6 below summarises the findings.

Table 6: Correlation between EQ and CGPA of Gen Z Participants

		CGPA	EQ	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	FI
CGPA	Pearson Correlation	1	.115	.099	.160	.129	.129	.068	-.034	.073	.135
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.207	.278	.079	.155	.157	.456	.710	.425	.140
	N	122	122	122	122	122	122	122	122	122	122

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As seen from Table 6 the Pearson correlational analysis revealed a *r*=0.115 suggesting a very weak positive relationship between the two variables being analysed. In other words, EQ does not have a strong bearing on participants' academic performance. This finding is in line with the research conducted by Chang and Tsai (2022) who also observed that the emotional intelligence of students did not have a direct impact on their academic performance. The same conclusion was also reached by Roso-Bas et al. 's (2015) study in which they reported absence of such association between emotional intelligence and academic performance.

This finding contradicts previous research findings that have proven a positive correlation between emotional intelligence skills and academic achievement. Among them, studies by Qualter et al. (2009), Al-Asmari (2014), Noor Haslinda et al. (2018) and Halimi et al. (2020) that concluded a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic success of students.

5.   Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that Gen Z participants have an average EQ score, slightly above the 2.8 threshold for an average EQ level, classifying it as a "low-high" EQ level. This finding might be unexpected considering the common perception that Gen Z excels in expressing their emotions effectively. Nevertheless, the reasonable indicator of EQ level indicates that the participants are capable of managing their emotions adequately to support their academic endeavours.

As for the affective factors of the EQ among the Gen Z, the study identified 4 affective factors that contribute to the participants' EQ which are Emotional Expression, Emotional Conscientiousness, Emotional Maturity and Emotional Awareness. These domains suggest that Gen Z participants possess the ability to effectively utilise their emotions while maintaining ethical standards, demonstrate responsible emotional management, and navigate and respond effectively to emotional situations and interactions However, they appear to be lacking in the Emotional Control, Emotional Commitment and Emotional Fortitude domains indicating that they might not be able to control their feelings well that can lead them to have difficulties to face emotional challenges both in their studies and everyday lives.

Even though EQ is found by past studies as a predictor of academic success. This study recorded no significant relationship between EQ and academic performance of Gen Z participants. This outcome might be influenced by a variety of factors, including study habits, the learning environment, motivation, and the quality of teaching. It is important to recognise that emotional intelligence is just one component of academic success prediction, and it interacts with various other factors that collectively shape a student's academic achievements.

The findings obtained from this preliminary study contribute empirical data towards the knowledge in the Gen Z's level of EQ and the affective factors they possess. For the Gen Z themselves, having an insight about their own EQ dimensions can help them make more informed choices regarding career, job, task, or profession, as well as provide a deeper understanding of themselves.

As the skills that make up EQ can be learned, educators need to recognise and may offer some objective intervention programmes that can improve Gen Z's weaknesses, thereby helping them foster their personal and professional growth. The findings can assist educators in helping Gen Z to make choices and decisions that are complemented by their strengths. With these findings, instructors can make informed, objective statements instead of relying on subjective assumptions, which can otherwise lead to misconceptions about this generation. Thus, any issue pertaining to academic achievement may be understood. This, in turn, will be able to meet the goal of providing quality education for all.

This study also holds implications for higher education, particularly concerning the significance of aligning with the first principle in the Higher Education "Roadmap to 2030" (UNESCO, 2022), which focuses on "Inclusion, Equity and Pluralism." The roadmap emphasises the necessity for higher education institutions worldwide to prioritise diversity, inclusivity, and equity, which can also be achieved by addressing emotional intelligence (EQ) research and implementation. To effectively foster emotional intelligence among diverse student populations, including Generation Z, institutions must commit to inclusivity and consider the unique socio-cultural and educational contexts of various groups. By adhering to this principle, higher education institutions can better prepare students for the complex challenges of the 21st century and contribute to global sustainability and social responsibility goals as outlined in the "Roadmap to 2030".

6.   Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Ariffin, K. conceived, planned and wrote the manuscript. Aziz, R.A contributed towards the statistical analysis of the data, Ariffin, K. Mohari, S.K.M and Tahreb, N.S worked on the literature review. All authors provided feedback and contributed in shaping the study, analysis and manuscript.

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