


Article

Needs Analysis of Psychosocial Module Development Based on Psychoeducation Approach for Public University Students in Malaysia

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Abstract: This study is a needs analysis that aims to develop a psychosocial module based on a psychoeducation approach in order to strengthen the assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being of public university students in Malaysia. The specific objectives of this study were to identify the perceptions of university students on the need to design and build a psychosocial module, identify the constructs that should be included in the phase of designing and building of the psychosocial module as well as the support that has been received and the support that the students desire while on campus. This survey study utilized a questionnaire distributed to a total of 286 first year students studying at three public universities in Malaysia. The data obtained were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study showed a highly positive response from the students toward the development of a psychosocial module and the constructs listed in the questionnaire. Implications from this study can further solidify the constructs that should be included in the design and construction of the psychosocial module as well as identify the availability of the approaches, strategies, and support activities that have been received and desired by the students.

Keywords: needs analysis; psychosocial module development; psychoeducation; assertiveness; social skills; psychological well-being; university students in Malaysia



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1. Introduction

Although higher learning institutions are considered stable institutions for accommodating a group of high achievers with great intellectual capacity, there are, however, some students who face many problems or difficulties that cause them to be unable to complete their studies. Among the many issues discussed at the national and international levels are mental health and the psychological well-being of students [1]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the proportion of students declaring themselves as facing psychological issues against the whole population of students in universities worldwide have increased in recent years [2]. Furthermore, a research conducted by researchers from the WHO World Mental Health International College Student Initiative (WMH-ICS) also showed that one third of first year students experienced at least one psychological disorder such as anxiety, panic disorder, or substance disorder [3–5]. Other research conducted by Lipson [6] and Evans [7] also showed that the issue of the students' mental and psychological well-being was worse and more serious compared to the non-student population of the same age.

In their study, Shamunip and Mageswari [8] evaluated the psychological well-being of 308 Malaysian undergraduates and revealed that the students were operating at a sub-optimal functioning level and experiencing depression. According to Manap et al. [9],

being confined to their hostel rooms or homes without social contact during the recent quarantine made these levels worse. In the field of education, low level of psychological well-being can have a negative impact on the students' achievement and therefore, less or no motivation to continue their studies. In addition, Zahra and Soleimani [10] found the existence of a relationship between psychological well-being and cognitive achievement with academic achievement such as average grade point and exam scores. According to Ryff [11], psychological well-being is determined by a few functionalities in life such as having a positive relationship with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, self-acceptance, purpose in life, and personal growth. However, according to Erpiana and Fourianalistyawati [12], psychological well-being is seen as the individual's capabilities in facing challenges and striving to function completely. On another account, according to Suvera [13], psychological well-being is connected to the physical and mental well-being of an individual. It also has a connection with a person's feelings toward daily life and psychological pressures such as anxiety, depression, disappointment, emotional fatigue, uneasiness, and dissatisfaction. Generally, a student's psychological well-being is focused on life's experience, feelings of oneself, and good mental health. Therefore, there is a need for the psychological well-being of students to be given more serious attention by all parties.

The effects of academic experience in the first year may differ at every university, but under normal circumstances, it depends on the level of the students' academic and social integration. Therefore, the most important goal for all universities is not only to provide knowledge and focus on student well-being, but also to encourage students to build social skills for their current academic and professional pursuits. This is because first year students not only have to adjust to university life, but they have to adapt to the environment, new social relationships, and different cultures [14,15]. Nonetheless, first year students require different social competencies throughout their academic years such as social skills and assertiveness as mechanisms in communication, adaptability, and well-being as well as strengthening their relationships with their fellow classmates, faculty, lecturers, and community [16,17]. However, the study by Chin [18] found that many university students in Malaysia had low levels of social skills, which were non-assertive [19], low communication efficiency, and as in many countries, on average, many students were also found to have moderate skill level in future orientation, critical thinking, identity creation, and pro social tendencies [20,21].

Before explaining the concept of social skills, it should be known that there are several terms related to social skills, namely interpersonal skills [22], interpersonal abilities, social capabilities [23], and interpersonal and social communication [24]. However, social skills are generally defined as intra and interpersonal skills such as communication skills, teamwork, and cooperation. In addition, social skills are also a class of different social behaviors that help individuals to cope with the interpersonal interaction process. In other words, social skills can contribute to positive interpersonal relationships, which then lead to better health, self-satisfaction, professional achievement, better teamwork, quality life, and respect for others [25,26]. Assertiveness is also one of the components in social skills. Assertiveness is important in helping students to be more open, confident, improve satisfaction, and be able to establish good relationships. This aspect of skills should be emphasized to produce students who are not only knowledgeable in the academic field, but also students who have high competitiveness, are able to communicate effectively, able to think creatively, critically, and to act rationally. There are a few studies that have proven that assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being can be shaped and enhanced in someone at school, college, and even at the university through intervention or exercise. For example, Hamidah [27] conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) group counseling, and social skills training on student psychological well-being and social skill. The results showed that the intervention was effective in improving the students' psychological well-being and social skills. Robson et al. [28] conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of psychoeducational interventions in

improving the social skills of 57 medical students studying in bilingual universities. The results showed that there was an average increase in scores related to social skills, assertiveness, and academic experience. This proves that all three aspects can be enhanced and further developed through psychoeducation, counselling, workshops or any given exercises [29–31]. However, a psychoeducation approach is often used in institutions such as colleges and universities to assist the counsellor or facilitator to convey information on a short-term basis, especially with the increase in student numbers on a daily basis. Through this approach, information is conveyed in various methods such as lectures, slide shows, videos, forum discussions, and others. Psychoeducation is an approach that focuses on the client's psychological aspect and also educates clients on the techniques and strategies that are educational. It also plays a similar role to counselling and psychotherapy in molding the individuals toward being more positive [32–34]. Therefore, the whole problem demands an intervention that can play a dominant role in promoting psychological well-being, developing social skills as well as assertiveness and thus increasing the probability of guidance and counselling services being sought and seen by students as high quality, effective, and comfortable resources.

Besides, many researchers have mentioned the need for a regular evaluation of the needs of university students [35,36], highlighting its multiple benefits, and the possibility of designing different interventions according to the specific needs of the students. For example, Joana et al. [36] conducted a study to explore the psychological intervention needs of the students attending Portuguese Catholic University. The results indicate that participants need more information or support in the areas of the management of anxiety and nervousness, fear of failure, job search, career choice, and time management skills. However, it is not necessarily the case that institutions of higher education in this country have invested in the creation of these interventions, and at times, their presence and availability does not guarantee that they are demanded, since students do not always see them as an effective and convincing resource to support their needs [37]. In this sense, the present study aims to explore the student's needs for psychosocial modules based on a psychoeducation approach in strengthening assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being. For this purpose, the needs related to constructs that should be included in the phase of designing the module were also explored as well as the preferences regarding the desired support and the support that was previously received.

2. Methodology

The focus of this study was to carry out a needs analysis to (i) explore the student's needs of a psychosocial module; (ii) determine the construct required in the design and construction phase of a psychosocial module aimed to strengthen assertiveness, social skill, and psychological well-being university students; and (iii) examine the support that has been received and the support desired by students. The needs analysis used survey design and data that were analyzed through a quantitative approach [38,39]. The study sample selected was 286 first year university students in Malaysia. These students were randomly selected from three public universities in Malaysia. This study used an online questionnaire in which a Google form acted as the response platform. The general construct of this questionnaire was divided into two sections. Part A consisted of the respondent's demographic information such as gender, race, field of study, socio-economic status (SSE), and place of residence. Meanwhile, Part B consisted of three questions involving the needs for the development of a psychosocial module, the constructs required in the design and construction of a psychosocial module, and the support that has been received and the support desired by students. Part B uses the Guttman Scale, which asks respondents to express their opinions (either agree or disagree) on the items presented.

The questionnaire was developed by the research team based on an adaptation and reconstruction of appropriate items and constructs from three measurement tools, namely, the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) [40,41], Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales [42,43], and Social Skills Inventory [44,45] as well as past study questionnaires that had been

conducted with an almost similar purpose. Before the actual distribution process of the needs analysis among the respondents, the set of questionnaires were verified and validated by six referral experts in psychology and counselling, module development, and academics. Suggestions for the improvement and modification of the questionnaires from the expert panels were applied before conducting the study on the actual target. Experts also provided written reviews that the module was suitable for an intervention program to achieve the set objectives.

3. Results

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to describe the demographic information of the respondents covering gender, race, field of study, socioeconomic status (SSE), and place of residence, the needs of a psychosocial module developed based on demographics, the construct required in the design of a psychosocial module and the support that has been received and desired by the respondents.

3.1. Demographic of Respondents

A total of 286 students enrolled at three public universities in Malaysia participated in this study. Of these participants, 161 were female and 125 male. In terms of ethnicity, most of the respondents were Malay (194), followed by Indians (51), and Chinese (41). The participants comprised students from varying fields of studies from which a total of 97 respondents were from the social sciences while the remaining 189 were from the field of science and technology. Regarding their place of residence, 103 of respondents were from rural areas, and most of the respondents were from urban areas (131). Finally, regarding socio-economic status (SSE), a total of 63 respondents came from a high socio-economic status, 132 were from a medium socio-economic status, and the remaining 91 respondents were from a low socioeconomic status family. The demographic information of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic of the respondents (n = 286).

Demographic	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	125	44
Female	161	56
Race		
Malay	194	68
Chinese	51	18
Indian	41	14
Field of study		
Science and technology	97	34
Social science	189	66
Place of residence		
Urban	172	60
Rural	114	40
Family socioeconomic status		
High	63	22
Medium	132	46
Low	91	32

3.2. The Need for Psychosocial Module Development

Regarding the evaluation of the needs of the development of a psychosocial module, a total of 234 respondents agreed on the need to develop a psychosocial module. Of the total, 136 were female, while 98 were male. For fields of studies, a total of 172 respondents who agreed on the need for a psychosocial module were respondents from the field of social

sciences while the remaining 62 were students from the field of science and technology. Regarding place of residence, 131 of respondents were urban and 103 respondents were rural. Meanwhile, regarding ethnicity, a total of 171 respondents were Malay, followed by Chinese (32), and the remaining 31 were Indian, indicating their agreement on the development of this module. Table 2 shows the evaluation of the need of psychosocial module development based on the demographics as discussed.

Table 2. The needs of psychosocial module development.

Demographic	Evaluation	
	Agree	Disagree
Gender		
Male	98	27
Female	136	25
Race		
Malay	171	23
Chinese	32	19
Indian	31	10
Fields of Studies		
Science and Technology	62	35
Social Science	172	17
Place of Residence		
Urban	131	41
Rural	103	11
Family Socioeconomic Status		
High	52	11
Medium	97	35
Low	85	6

3.3. Constructs Required in Designing the Psychosocial Module

In this study, the constructs used in designing and building the psychosocial module were from three instruments: Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS), Del Prette's Social Skills Inventory; and Olaz and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales. Therefore, the questionnaire for data collection used the constructs from these three tools to identify the constructs required by respondents to be included as the content and elements in the psychosocial module. Based on the descriptive analysis that was undertaken, a total of 76% of respondents agreed that the construct the ability to respect should be included in the psychosocial module. In addition, as many as 82% of respondents agreed and required to construct the ability to say 'no'. Meanwhile, 83%, 80%, and 78% of the respondents agreed to construct the ability to express feeling, probability of making mistakes, and interacting and communication should be included in the psychosocial module. Furthermore, 80% of respondents agreed with the construct of coping and self-assertion with risk, 78% agreed with self-assertion in expressing positive effects, 82% on conversation and social confidence, 78% on self-exposure to unknown people and new situations, and 77% on self-control from aggressiveness. Meanwhile, 74% of respondents agreed with autonomy constructs, 82% with environmental mastery, 77% with personal growth, 75% with purpose in life, 76% with positive relationships with others, and 74% agreed that the self-acceptance construct should be included in the psychosocial module. Table 3 shows the constructs that should be included in the phase of designing the psychosocial module as discussed.

Table 3. Constructs required in designing the psychosocial module.

Original Instruments	Constructs	Evaluation			
		Agree		Disagree	
		f	%	f	%
Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS)	The ability to respect	217	76	69	24
	The ability to say 'no'	235	82	51	18
	The ability to express feeling	237	83	49	17
	Probability of making mistakes	229	80	57	20
	Interacting and communicating	223	78	63	23
Social Skill Inventory (SSI-Del-Prette)	Coping and self-assertion with risk	229	80	57	20
	Self-assertion in the expression of positive effect	223	78	63	22
	Conversation and social confidence	235	82	51	18
	Self-exposure to unknown people and new situations	229	80	57	20
	Self-control of aggressiveness	220	77	66	82
Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales	Autonomy	217	74	68	26
	Environmental mastery	235	82	51	18
	Personal growth	220	77	66	23
	Purpose in life.	215	75	71	25
	Positive relationship with others	217	76	69	24
	Self-acceptance	212	74	74	26

When evaluating the types of support desired by the respondents in light of their previously identified personal, career, and learning needs (Table 4), most of the respondents indicated a preference for workshops/brief courses (38%) and psychoeducation programs (24%), followed by group guidance (18%), seminars (6%), individual guidance (5%), individual counselling (4%), and group counselling (3%). About six respondents indicated that they did not want access to any type of support for their needs. For the evaluation of the types of support that were previously received by the participants, most of them indicated that they had not received any type of support (39%). About 33 respondents stated they had access to workshops/brief courses, 29 received psychoeducation training, 18 stated that they attended seminars, 15 participated in group guidance, eight participated in individual counseling, seven participated in individual guidance, and four participated in group counselling sessions.

Table 4. Evaluation of the desired support and the received support.

Types of Support	Desired		Received	
	f	%	f	%
Individual counselling	17	4	8	4
Group counselling	8	3	4	1
Group guidance	65	18	15	8
Individual guidance	21	5	7	4
Seminar	24	6	18	10
Workshop/Brief course	142	38	33	18
Psychoeducation program	88	24	29	16
None	6	2	73	39

4. Discussion

A needs analysis is important in identifying information regarding the aspect of module content that will be developed. Researchers conduct a needs analysis to collect information about the context and situational research. According to Aliza and Zamri [46], a module that is developed should take into account the issues that are being faced and the readily available needs, so that the module that is developed can serve the purpose of the target groups. For this study, students from public universities were selected as the target users to conduct the needs analysis for a psychosocial module whereas information on the content of the module was gathered from past studies as well as analyses on the documents pertaining to the issue and the current problems faced by students that need solutions. In general, the study focused on three main issues that have been studied during research regarding the needs for the development of a psychosocial module, the constructs required in the development of a psychosocial module as well as the form of the support received and the support desired by the students.

First, regarding the student's needs of the psychosocial module, the descriptive analysis showed that female respondents were more likely to agree with the development of a psychosocial module compared to male respondents. This may be because women are more affectionate, prone to crying, and at the same time, have lower assertiveness than male respondents. Apart from that, for the field of study, the findings showed that respondents from the social sciences were more likely to agree with the development of a psychosocial module than the respondents from the field of science and technology. I found that students in technical fields showed lower knowledge of emotions and social competence than students in non-technical fields. This may be related to a stereotypical understanding of the technical field, which requires only knowledge and core skills. On the other hand, according to Agnieszka [47], social skills have also been recognized as skills that should be possessed by all university students and need to be developed in other less formal (social) ways, as the emphasis to develop them in learning is not effective. For this reason, the field of study should also be considered in planning appropriate programs to develop the social skills of students.

However, for SSE, study has shown that most respondents that agreed with the developed psychosocial module were those with low SSE. Based on the research conducted by Namrata and Renu [48], students from low-income families displayed an overall pattern of psychological well-being, which was almost similar to students from middle income families. Besides, students from low-income families also displayed a low level in the autonomous dimension, but a high level in life purpose and self-acceptance. In contrast, for students from high-income families, they controlled all dimensions, which were environmental mastery, positive relationship with others, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and the overall PWB compared to students from middle income families. Therefore, considering all

these effects, it can be concluded that the students' socioeconomic status also contributed to better psychological well-being among the new undergraduates.

As for the constructs required in module development, most respondents agreed that the constructs regarding the ability to respect, the ability to say 'no, the ability to express feeling, probability of making mistakes, and interacting and communication should be included in the psychosocial module to increase their assertiveness. In this context, Malaysian ethics are quite different from Western ethics [49,50]. Previous studies have shown that assertiveness is less commended in Malaysia, which has a collectivist culture. The collectivist culture can be seen as reflected in the Malaysian students' preference for group success, teamwork, and interdependence as opposed to individual success, competition, and independence [51]. Therefore, these differences influence the level of assertiveness among the students in Malaysia, in which it was found that Asian students had a lower level of assertiveness compared to students in the West. In the field of education, the assertiveness skill is important to help students to express their needs and positive or negative feelings truthfully and forcefully without any worry or intimidation. Therefore, recognized constructs are required to develop this skill of assertiveness.

Meanwhile, more than 70% of students agreed that the constructs of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relationships with others, and self-acceptance should be included in the development of psychosocial modules. A study conducted by Cabrera, Daya, and Echague [52] to identify factors that affected the psychological well-being of students found that most university students had low levels of autonomy, environmental mastery and self-acceptance, and younger students had low environmental mastery. Therefore, by understanding the psychological and social constructs that influence PWB, then it can be used as content in the development of student interventions.

Finally, regarding the results of the desired support and the received support for their needs, most respondents indicated having participated in activities or programs in group and educational settings such as workshops/courses, psychoeducation programs, and seminars, which is compatible with other studies. The findings of this study also coincides with the study conducted by Hammad [53]; This is also in line with the views of Rodriguez et al. [54], who claimed that students preferred psychoeducation programs because of the student-centered learning, interactive lessons, and team dynamics. However, only a small number of respondents received and had access to psychoeducation programs. Meanwhile, there are a number of students who state that they do not want any kind of support for their needs. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the participants who consider that they do not have any needs in particular and those who, even after finding out some issues, deny any type of support due to fear of the stigma or not knowing how or where to find it. Consequently, this finding shows the need to design and build a psychosocial module based on psychoeducation and can further increase the probability that these services will become greater in demand since they are seen by students as a resource of high-quality, is effective, and convenient.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is relevant to investigate and explore the students' needs before developing and implementing interventions so that students that need support have the opportunity to obtain it. With the realization of this study and considering any disparity between the results obtained and the literature mentioned, psychosocial modules based on psychoeducation should be developed and further contribute to responses that are technically and scientifically appropriate to the identified needs. From this juncture, further studies can be conducted by combining both qualitative and quantitative designs. In a nutshell, it is hoped that the findings of this study can play a role as a reference for future research in strengthening assertiveness, social skills, and psychological well-being for university students.

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