



Assessing the Resilience, Coping and Well-Being Attributes among Community College Students in Malaysia

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Abstract: In comparison, TVET students are generally known for lesser achievement in education than the mainstream students. Yet, being in higher institution, the students go through a similar stressing academic journey. This study aims to assess the resilience, coping and well-being attributes among community college students in Malaysia. The respondents comprise of 350 students from seven community colleges in Northern Peninsular Malaysia. Altogether, a high return of 95% with 221 female and 100 male students from five different semesters of study and 14 interdisciplinary TVET programs took part in the survey. A questionnaire constructed from the combination of Adolescent Resilience, Stress Coping Style Inventory (SCSI), and Flourishing Scale (FS) was used as a self-reporting tool and SPSS version 25 was used to analyze the data through descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that the scores for resilient, coping ability and well-being assessment for the students are satisfactory. We also found that there is no significant difference between male and female students. Also, academic performance programme and semester of study are not the predictors of resilience, coping and well-being level among the students. The findings are important to understand the quality of life of community college students and by understanding these attributes, learning strategies can be designed better thus enriching total learning experience. Decision-makers will be able to plan for affirmative actions in helping the students to attain lifelong satisfaction and promising future careers. This study suggests active interventions from TVET institutions to enhance a more conducive environment to stimulate better self-regard among the students.

Key words: *resilience, coping skills, well-being, community college students, TVET, quality of life*

INTRODUCTION

Being part of TVET is rather challenging for community college students because at one end, they are considered as those who failed to enter the university system and hence regarded as ‘lower class’ compared to their equivalents in the mainstream education. At the other end, they are expected to be the semi-skilled manpower that can contribute to the nation’s socio-economic growth, although they enter the TVET system with minimum qualification. To exemplify, the entry requirement for community college is only a pass in Malay language and History.

There is a great paucity of studies regarding community college students’ life quality. Previous studies on resilience, coping and well-being are more focused on university students. For example, Pidgeon and Pickett, (2017) conducted a study to examine the

level of resilience on mindfulness, psychological distress and coping strategies on Australian university students. Similarly, McLafferty, Mallet and McCauley, (2012) studied the relationship between resilience and coping among a Northern Island university students. In Malaysia, Yu Kai et al., (2020) present a study on life satisfaction among Malaysian undergraduate university students by assessing their well-beings. Nonetheless, most researchers agree that resilience, coping and well-being is the overarching attributes to better life quality.

Malaysia itself has clearly stated in The Malaysia National Education Philosophy, that it aims to produce individuals who are “intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God”. Further, Malaysia has positioned TVET as the moving force towards a developed country (Mohamad Sattar, et al., 2015) and the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025

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highlights on the government strategy in steering towards a 7.8% increment in enrolment for TVET sectors for 2025, which is the highest percentage in comparison to private institutions (5.1%), public universities (2.6%) and other institutions (1.4%), (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2015). Currently, there are more than 500 public TVET institutions that offer ranges of programs and levels of education throughout the country with over 600,000 students enrolled in TVET programs at technical universities, polytechnics and community colleges (Policy Coordination Division, 2018).

The vast number of students deserves urgent attention as these are the future of Malaysia that is hoped to keep the national education aspiration alive. More than that, the TVET students are the key assets that contribute to the nation's growth. As stipulated in the 12th National Key Economic Areas (NKEA), 1.3 million of TVET related jobs are required to support the growth of the country (Zanariah, 2016). These facts and figures accentuate the impetus for this study that is to assess the quality of life of TVET students in Malaysia. Hence, it is the right time to focus on the interest of TVET students in this country.

Resilience

Resilience, as defined by Oshio et al., (2003), is the capacity to adapt to the unfavorable situation and is the key element in managing daily lives difficulties among students. This element has also been linked to emotional intelligence and personal strengths (McLafferty et al., 2012). The interest in resilience in higher education is relatively a growing phenomenon due to globalization that significantly affects students in higher education (Caruana, et al., 2011).

Coping

On the other hand, coping is the mechanism used to face stressful condition (Ying & Farn, 2010). Studies have shown that coping contributes to better academic lives (Thompson, 2015). This has been supported by Pierceall and Keim, (2007) who conducted a study on stress and coping strategies among 212 community college students in southern Illinois. The authors conclude that female students are more prone to stress than male students, yet better in coping and performed better in terms of academic achievement. Coping has always been linked to resilience (McLafferty et al., 2012).

Well-being

By the same token, French, Marshall, and Morris, (2011) state that well-being refers to a balanced circumstance of physical, social and psychological health, as well as spiritual, which leads to a satisfactory

presence. The authors maintain that it is crucial to instill this cognizance among students since this will allow them to realize their potential and continue to grow and contribute to community and society.

Methodology

Respondents

A total of 350 students from seven community colleges in the northern region of Malaysia were chosen to participate in this study using purposive sampling. From the 350 questionnaires distributed, 91.7% were returned. The gender distribution shows that 31.2% male and 68.8% female students encompass 14 certificate courses including Certificate in Light Vehicle Services, Certificate in 2D Animation, Certificate in Culinary, Certificate in Creative Multimedia Advertising and Certificate in Fashion Apparel took part in the survey. The highest percentage of respondents according to semester is from semester 2 students with 59.7%. Malays comprise the highest number of students with 89.7%, followed by Indian 5.3%, Chinese 2.8% and others 2.2%.

Measures

A 6-points Likert scale questionnaire ranging from 6 for "Strongly Agree", 5 for "Agree", 4 for "Quite Agree", 3 for "Somewhat Disagree", 2 for "Disagree" to 1 for "Strongly Disagree" through self-administration. The questionnaire consisted of 3 measurement scales. Part A of the questionnaire consists of 21 items from Adolescent Resilience Scale by Oshio, et al., (2002) that revolves around novelty seeking, emotional regulation, and positive future orientation. Part B is adapted from Stress Coping Style Inventory (SCSI) by Ying and Farn, (2010) that contains 28 items which are divided into active problem coping, active emotional coping, passive problem coping and passive emotional coping. Flourishing Scale (FS), developed by (Diener et al., 2009) with 10 questions pertaining to well-being that measure the student's self-perceived realization in central extents such as interactions, self-worth, perseverance, and confidence is used in Part C.

Table 1 - Sample items.

	Resilience	Coping	Well-being
Item number	1-21	22-50	51-60
Sample Item	<i>I always seek new challenges</i>	<i>I try to do or think of some things and that will</i>	<i>I lead a purposeful</i>

	<i>make me feel happier, and allow myself to relax.</i>	<i>meaningful life.</i>
<i>I think I can control my emotions.</i>	<i>I blame myself, retreat or shut myself away when I face stress.</i>	<i>I am a good person and live a good life.</i>
<i>I am sure that good things will happen in the future.</i>	<i>I discuss issues with teachers, family, seniors or friends and classmates and ask for their opinions.</i>	<i>People respect me.</i>
<i>I have difficulty in controlling my anger.</i>	<i>I do not give in when I argue with my friends.</i>	<i>Overall, I am satisfied with my life.</i>

Procedure

Permission to conduct the research was requested prior to the distribution of questionnaires by sending letter of information and consent to the community colleges. The questionnaires were personally distributed during lecture time and some by mail. Through direct personal distribution, we described the purpose of the survey and informed the participants of their rights during short briefings before handing out the questionnaires. The survey took approximately 25 minutes and upon completion, we collected the questionnaires and thanked the participants.

Results

Internal Consistencies

The internal consistencies of the three inventory scales present satisfactory result whereby well-being contributes the highest reliability with $\alpha = .85$, followed by coping $\alpha = .80$ and resilience with $\alpha = .76$. The results are consistent with previous studies by Diener et al., (2009) Ying and Farn, (2010), as well as Oshio et al., (2003) respectively.

Table 2 - Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients.

Items	Alpha (α)
A – Reliability	.85
B – Coping	.80
C – Well-being	.76

Level of resilience, coping and well-being

The level of resilience, coping and well-being among the community college students are presented in Table 3. The scores for resilience ranged from 61 to 126 ($M = 94.49$), while coping ranged from 45 to 113 ($M = 68.05$) and well-being ranged from 27 to 60 ($M = 47.04$).

Table 3 - The level of resilience, coping and well-being among community college students.

Attribute	Mean	Std. Deviation
Resilience	94.49	10.43
Coping	68.05	9.22
Well-being	47.04	6.99

The highest response for resilience is for item "I like new or intriguing things" with 45% responded "strongly agree" and 39% responded with "agree". Other items with high mean score are "I am sure good things will happen in the future", "I am striving towards my future goals" and "I think difficulties form a part of life's valuable experiences". In contra, the least mean score is reported for item "I lose interest quickly" with 64% responses range from "somewhat disagree" to "strongly disagree". Items with low mean score includes "I cannot endure adversity", "I have difficulty in controlling my anger" and "I find it bothersome to start new activities".

In terms of coping, most students chose "I tell myself to persevere" rather than other responses such as talking to classmates or online friends or discuss with teachers, family, seniors or friends. As expected, 58% chose "strongly disagree" to the item "I give up and blame God for being unfair when I stress face" while only 7% responded to "strongly agree".

For well-being, the highest mean is for the item "Overall, I am satisfied with my life" with 45.2% students responded with "strongly agree" while the lowest mean is "I am engaged and interested in my daily activities" with 52.9% is in the range between "Strongly agree" to "Quite Agree". Other items include "I lead a purposeful and meaningful life", "I am a good person and live a good life", "I am optimistic about my future" and "people respect me". All responses are in the range of 5 to 6 except for item "I am a good person and live a good life" at the range of 4 to 5. The high score indicates high level of inner resources and strengths of the students (Diener et al., 2009).

Gender Comparison

In terms of gender comparison, the independent group t-test results showed that there is no significant differences between the two genders in which, resilience ($t = -1.083, p > 0.05$), coping ($t = 1.141, p > 0.05$) and well-being ($t = -.620, p > 0.05$).

Table 4 - Gender comparison

Attribute		Male	Female
Resilience	Mean	93.56	94.92
	(SD)	(11.02)	(10.15)
Coping	Mean	67.16	68.45
	(SD)	(8.65)	(9.46)
Well-being	Mean	46.68	47.20
	(SD)	(7.25)	(6.87)

Correlations coefficients

The correlation coefficients shows that items are significantly correlated as shown in Table 5. Further investigation however revealed that there is no significant relationship between resilience ($t = -.390$, adjusted $R^2 = -.006, p = .697$), coping ($t = .608$, adjusted $R^2 = -.005, p = .544$), well-being ($t = -1.60$, adjusted $R^2 = .011, p = .112$) and academic performance of the students. Similarly, the semester that the students are currently at is not statistically significant which means that it has no impact on the level of resilience, coping and well-being of the students. Likewise, the programme that the students enrolled in has no significant correlation with resilience and coping, but has a negative correlation with well-being ($\beta = .186, t = -2.791, r = -.162, p = 0.004$).

Table 5 - Item-total Pearson Correlations

	1	2	3
1. Resilience			
2. Coping	.55**		
3. Well-being	.51**	.50**	

** $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed)

Discussion

From the result, we know that the level of resilience, coping and well-being among the community college students are at a satisfactory level. Nonetheless, internal interventions such as enhancing the role of academic advisors, counsellors and peer groups in the institution could be initiated to at least maintain the circumstance.

Interventions have been known as a very effective mechanism in mediating issues associated with resilience, coping and students' well-being (Innes, 2017; Pidgeon & Pickett, 2017; Bosman, 2015). In fact, the OECD Learning Framework 2030 suggested constructive criteria including these self-induced attributes to be the base of curriculum design to support the competencies required to blend in well with the world of work (OECD, 2018).

For resilience, we reported that the students easily lose interest but somehow reluctant to embrace changes and have trouble controlling anger. These mannerisms could be the manifestation of their frustration, and in this case, lecturers may play an important role by being more supportive so the students can be more at ease while dealing with the stress associated with studying.

In coping, the students are found to be more comfortable keeping things to themselves rather than opening up to their circle of acquaintances. This could indicate issues regarding their lack of self-confidence and social interactions. Therefore, the students should be given more control in the classroom with lecturers scaffolding the learning process. In the long run, stronger self-esteem among the students might be achieved.

Concerning well-being, the students revealed their lack of engagement and interests in their lives. This is detrimental in terms of life and career choices. Career indecision might lead the students to be unprepared to enter the world of work and causes prolonged stress that in turn jeopardize the quality of life and this is why it is important to acknowledge the students' well-being from an early stage.

Apart from that, we established that there is no significant difference between male and female students and that the length of study, programme that they enrolled in pose insignificant effect toward the level of resilience, coping and well-being of the students. Interestingly, the students are found to be having a high level of curiosity that they keep on finding new things intriguing and are very positive about their future. This shows that the students are decidedly high-spirited and have high potential despite not being in the university. Perhaps, coming from a relatively low economic background restrict these students from achieving better academic results. This study is essential in revealing the factual conditions of the community college students and what they are capable of. For instance, given the right opportunity, these students could possibly achieve better than their university counterparts.

Overall, this study presents the idea that resilience, coping and well-being is paramount to the quality of life. Even more so for community college students in Malaysia as they contribute a significant number of statistics in Malaysia educational system. In a broader lens, this study could assist academics,

curriculum designers and policymakers in structuring curriculum strategies that suits the individual needs of the TVET students. Besides, the amount of research towards TVET, specifically community college students' quality of life is relatively scarce in the Malaysian setting. The present study will add a small contribution to the body of knowledge. Most importantly, this study could serve as a significant indicator of the Malaysian education system as the system is expected to shape knowledgeable and competent Malaysians, who possess high moral standards, highly responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being and the ability to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large (Policy Coordination Division, 2018).

While conducting this study, few assumptions were observed. First, since respondents are selected from TVET programs at Malaysian community colleges, it is assumed that the respondents would relate a similar experience. Secondly, the questionnaire is a prevailing instrument to exude the information from the respondents and it is anticipated that the respondents' opinions can be measured while being open and sincere in responding to the items in the survey. It is expected that the participants will be sincerely interested to answer the given questions. Also, since the participants only include several programs, generalizations are limited to the findings from these population groups. Besides, the integrity of the respondents is not guaranteed and their true opinions could not be solicited solely by the survey.

Future studies could focus on affirmative actions in promoting better welfare for community college students. For example, the role of lecturers as the agents of influence could be further implored and explored. Further, service-learning delivery could be enhanced and learning space and a more student-friendly financial plan could be effected instead of spending most of the budget allocation on management and administration expenses.

Conclusion

Resilience, coping and well-being have been the major interests of researchers from diverse area of studies worldwide including teaching and learning. The intensity of research interest in this area of knowledge indicates that there is no doubt these attributes are inevitable in academic excursion thus students need to learn how to manage their intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical health while still in the educational sphere of influence. Studies have also shown that higher education students are predisposed to anxiety as a transitional process from high school to higher education is always stressful due to changes in the learning environment and social adaptation. This

study decides that there is a need for intervention in promoting resilience, coping ability and well-being in TVET educational development to produce holistic and well-balanced individuals and most of all, to prepare the students into the real world of work, better society and contribute to the nation's human capital growth.

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