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Research Article

Beyond Beauty: Enhancing Cosmetology Students' Emotional Resilience Through A Wellness Community Project on Senior Citizens

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research project was to examine the effects of service learning on 19 students' emotional intelligence and adversity quotient which can be vital in prepping them for the real world. It was a twofold project as it also tackled the stigma on senior citizens who are often overlooked from receiving grooming treatments. Hence, a group of cosmetology students from Keningau Vocational College conducted grooming treatments comprising manicure, pedicure and massaging for the residents of an old folks' home in Papar, Sabah. These students were required to answer two instruments that gauged their emotional intelligence and resilience technically known as adversity quotient. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank Correlation Coefficient. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence was strongly correlated with adversity quotient in which the better the students were in emotional awareness, regulation and utilization, the better they could cope with pressure from challenges and conflicts. This suggests that service learning can potentially nurture students especially vocational students to be psychologically stronger.

Keywords: *Adversity Quotient, Emotional Intelligence, Grooming, Service Learning*

Introduction

The importance of self-care and wellness as well as grooming services has gained prominence among our society which is a good sign of how people in general are taking good care of their wellbeing but there is still stigma on senior citizens that they receive less attention

and therefore, they likely become less inclined to seek such services. Hence, this project seeks to address that while boosting emotional intelligence and resilience of our vocational students with practical field experience of providing treatments to senior citizens. Thus, it was a twofold project that attempted to tackle two

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main issues, marginalized senior citizens especially those in old folks' houses as well as the need to enhance emotional strength of vocational students.

Problem Statement

Self-care and wellness are crucial to our wellbeing and a part of this includes grooming treatments and services such as maintaining healthy appearance and physique through pedicure, manicure, massaging and haircut. However, the stigma and stereotypes associated with age are commonplace and majority of senior citizens, mainly those who rely on caregiving, are usually neglected in terms of their need for grooming treatments. It is more challenging for those who stay away from their families particularly those who are residing in old folks' homes or retirement homes.

On the other note, there are vocational college students who learn skills that they can use to assist the community which resonates with the aspiration of our nation to equip more of our citizens with technical expertise through technical and vocational education and training (TVET) where they earn accredited qualification. However, possessing vocational skills alone is not enough as working in the industry requires individuals who can remain resilient in facing challenges at workplace and youths nowadays tend to break down under pressure or have difficulty handling conflicts tactfully while the world of labour and trades become more volatile and competitive.

Therefore, service learning which is an approach where students gain enriching learning experience by providing services, which

requires them to put what they have learnt into practice, to preselected beneficiaries is a feasible solution which can enable expose the students to the real-world work experience while the selected old folks' home's residents receive the well-deserved grooming treatment.

Beyond Beauty

Beyond Beauty is a student-led initiative launched by Cosmetology programme at Keningau Vocational College, Sabah, Malaysia which seeks to provide grooming service to the underserved communities especially senior citizens in order to enable them to receive hygiene and self-care that can promote wellness and wellbeing routine among themselves as well as their caregivers. It also aims to enhance their self-esteem and promote social connection in helping to tackle their sense of loneliness and being neglected. In addition to grooming services, social activities such as line dancing and karaoke singalong are also part of the project.

In 2026, the project was one of several student-led projects nationwide selected to receive grants from The Starfish Foundation through Project for Happiness 2.0. There was a rigorous and competitive selection process which required proposal submission, proposal revision, online mentoring, online consultation and live pitch as the final stage of the selection. The project was awarded MYR 4000.00 by the judges who delivered the verdict once the question-and-answer session that followed the live pitch ended. The grant was used to support the expenses of carrying out the project at the same old folks' home.



Figure 1. The Cosmetology Programme with the Residents of the Old Folks' Home

Objectives and Research Questions

This project sought to address the two issues by researching cosmetology students' emotional resilience when giving grooming services to residents of a local old folks' home.

1. What are the levels of emotional intelligence and resilience among the cosmetology students involved in elderly wellness activities?
2. Is there a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and resilience among cosmetology students involved in elderly wellness activities?

Adversity Quotient (AQ)

Stolz (1997) defined adversity quotient (AQ) as an individual's ability to endure, handle and tackle challenges and difficulties in one's life. In the context of educational institution among students, it refers to their ability to remain persistent and motivated in overcoming challenges stemming from personal life or from academic standpoints. Pangma, Tayraukham, and Nuangchalerm (2009) conducted a study on factors influencing AQ on 672 twelfth-grade students of academic mainstream schools and 376 third-year vocational students in Thailand and they discovered that self-esteem was a significant factor in both groups of students while singling out, achievement motivation which is a person's desire to pursue significant accomplishment of certain goals, mastery of specific skills and reaching a particular standard (McClellan & Boyatzis, 1982) as the strongest factor for vocational students' adversity quotient.

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Wong and Law (2022) define emotional intelligence (EI) as individual's abilities to understand and regulate their own emotions and empathize other's emotions and use emotions effectively to guide their thinking and behaviors. Research on Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale was done by Park and Yu (2021) on 84 hospital nurses in South Korea to verify the validity of the items and the research revealed that nurses with higher emotional intelligence

are better in regulating their emotions, coping with stress, maintaining interpersonal communication and workplace engagement.

Service Learning on AQ and EI

Service learning is described as an educational approach that integrates learning blended with community service (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). A study was conducted by Zhang, Wang and Chen (2023) on the effects of service-learning on the AQ and EI of 139 Chinese undergraduates in Hong Kong by assigning them to those who had participated in service-learning and those who never took part in any. The findings revealed that the students who took part in service-learning showed great improvement in AQ and EI.

Methodology

There were 19 students of an intact class aged 19 who gave grooming treatments to the residents of Holy Family Residence for Senior Citizens, Papar, Sabah. They were required to answer the adapted Emotional Intelligence Scale and Adversity Quotient (Table 1) after completing the treatment. The data were analyzed through two statistical tests, descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, to address the two research questions. The limited number of respondents was a limitation in this study since this might be inadequate for the results to be extrapolated for wider population of students across vocational colleges nationwide. Nevertheless, it might still give an insightful overview of how this approach could benefit vocational college students.

The activities took place in a one-day event where these students, along with supervising teachers from Keningau Vocational College, visited the old folks' home, Holy Family Residence for Senior Citizens in Papar, Sabah, where the staff and the residents were aware of this visit and subsequently the grooming treatments as community service. There were three grooming services that the students provided to the residents and these were manicure, pedicure and massages.



Figure 2. The Cosmetology Student Cleaning and Polishing the Residents' Nails Through Manicure



Figure 3: Pedicure was one of the basics that these Cosmetology Students learnt from their courses

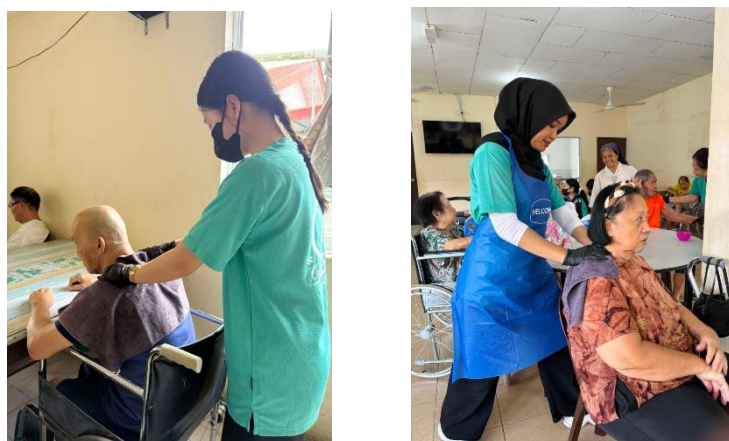


Figure 3. Some of the Residents received massaging treatment from the Students

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 is the descriptive statistics of the two instruments that examined the respondents' emotional intelligence and adversity

quotient. Based on the high mean values which ranged from 4.00 to 4.53, it is clear that the respondents demonstrated strong awareness of their own emotion, sensitivity towards others'

emotions and sensibility in using emotions to guide how they behave towards others and their thought on them and from the standpoint

of adversity quotient, they were able to withstand pressure from challenges and conflicts and were likely able to tackle them.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence and Adversity Quotient of the Respondents

No	Item	Mean	SD
1	I am aware of my feelings when interacting with the elderly during caregiving activities.	4.53	0.61
2	I can recognize when I feel stressed or tired while providing care.	4.00	0.67
3	I understand why certain emotions arise when helping the elderly.	4.26	0.81
4	I am aware that my mood affects the quality of care I provide.	4.00	0.94
5	I can detect the emotions of the elderly from their facial expressions or behavior.	4.10	1.15
6	I can recognize when the elderly feel uncomfortable or anxious during care sessions.	4.00	0.67
7	I understand when the elderly need emotional support even if they do not express it verbally.	4.26	1.10
8	I am sensitive to changes in the emotional state of the elderly I care for.	4.10	0.88
9	My emotions help me stay motivated in performing caregiving duties.	4.42	0.77
10	I use positive emotions to deliver care more effectively.	4.37	0.83
11	I remain enthusiastic to complete tasks even when I feel emotionally tired.	4.47	0.77
12	My emotions help me connect better with the elderly during caregiving.	4.47	0.70
13	I am able to control my emotions when facing emotional challenges during care.	4.32	0.67
14	I remain calm when caregiving procedures become difficult.	4.37	0.76
15	I maintain a positive attitude even when facing stressful care situations.	4.37	0.83
16	I can calm myself quickly when I feel emotionally overwhelmed during caregiving.	4.16	0.90
17	When facing difficulties during caregiving, I feel that I still have control over the situation.	4.26	0.93
18	I believe I can adjust my caregiving approach when challenges arise.	4.21	0.85
19	I am confident that I can take appropriate actions during difficult care situations.	4.37	0.76
20	I acknowledge my role when problems occur during caregiving.	4.37	0.76
21	When mistakes happen, I focus on what I can improve.	4.47	0.61
22	I am willing to learn and improve myself after facing caregiving challenges.	4.42	0.69
23	When one problem occurs, I do not allow it to affect other caregiving tasks.	4.26	0.81
24	Small problems during caregiving do not ruin my overall performance.	4.00	1.05
25	I can separate caregiving challenges from my personal life.	4.21	0.85
26	I believe that caregiving challenges will not last forever.	4.32	0.75
27	I know that difficulties in caregiving are usually temporary.	4.53	0.61
28	I feel confident that situations will improve even when sessions feel difficult.	4.37	0.76

Table 2 shows the results of the Spearman's rank-order correlation which was $\rho = .864$, $p < .001$, $n = 19$. This indicates that there was a very

strong and positive statistical significance of correlation between emotional intelligence and adversity quotient. This means that higher

level of emotional intelligence is strongly associated with higher level of resilience, as represented by adversity quotient, among the respondents. It can be deduced that individuals with stronger ability in understanding their emotions, regulate their emotions and use

emotions in thinking and behaviors are more able to endure and cope with pressure and challenges that may arise at workplace and in the context of this research, providing grooming services to the elderly.

Table 2. The Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient

			Emotional Intelligence	Adversity Quotient
Spearman's rho	Emotional Intelligence	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.864**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	19	19
	Adversity Quotient	Correlation Coefficient	.864**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	19	19

Implication

The findings of this research show that there is a strong correlation between emotional intelligence and adversity quotient which can be construed as resilience and this means that emphasizing emotional intelligence is crucial in enhancing students' resilience especially in preparing them for the real world. This research also corroborated the influence of service learning in strengthening students' emotional intelligence and resilience. The findings of this study can substantiate the incorporation of service learning into vocational college curriculum in order to consolidate students' mastery of technical skills while cultivating their soft skills and social values. The approach can be embedded in specific subjects in respect to specific trades and in subjects or courses that are more general without specification on technical skills.

Recommendation

For future studies, it is highly recommended that the sample size is increased in order to obtain findings that can be generalized better and more representative of the demographic group that is being studied. The effects of service-learning or other form of community-based intervention on students' emotional intelligence and resilience can be better understood and measured if pre-test and post-test designed is used to measure any improvement.

The long-term impact of this approach should be measured in order to determine whether the positive effects on students' emotional growth remain consistent after their experience and this is best gauged when the students are doing their internship as well as when they are at early stage of their career after graduation. Overall, it can be deduced that cultivating students' emotional intelligence and adversity quotient is necessary and service-learning or other community-based approaches can be efficacious in achieving this goal.

Conclusion

This research denotes the role of service learning such as in this context, providing grooming treatments to senior citizens at a retirement home, can bolster students' emotional intelligence which influences their resilience as evidenced by their adversity quotient. Since the mission of vocational education is to prepare students for the world of work, it is imperative to equip them with the ability to handle challenges, pressure and conflicts at workplace and service learning can improve their readiness by strengthening their emotional intelligence and subsequently, their resilience.

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Media Coverage & Article Publication

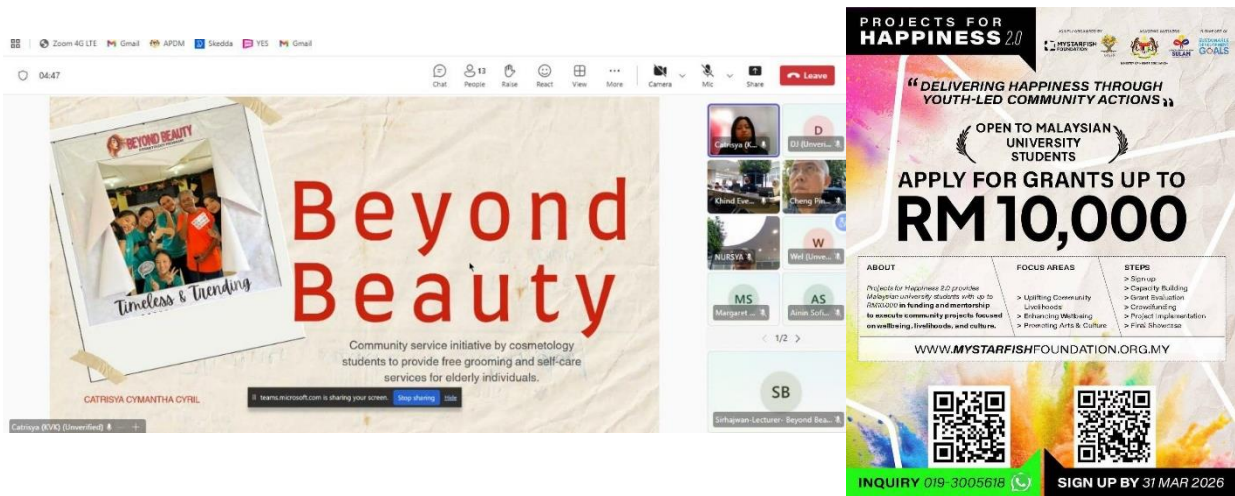


This project was covered in local news outlets namely Sinar Bestari, The Daily Express and TV Sabah in 2025



A feature article authored by one of the student leaders of the project was published in Breeze magazine in 2026.

Grant Awardee



This project was selected as one of the recipients of grants from The Starfish Foundation through Project for Happiness 2.0 in 2026 through a rigorous selection process. The project was awarded MYR 4000.00.

Project's Poster

