The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Supporting SDG 4 (Quality Education): Evidence from MUET and Employability Studies

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Abstract

SDG 4 recognizes the importance of inclusive and quality education that will prepare learners with relevant skills to succeed in life. The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) is still a common assessment used to benchmark English proficiency for entry into higher education systems in Malaysia but it has been identified to have limited predictive ability in link with workplace readiness. Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been found to affect academic and professional performance, making it an increasingly important skill for employers seeking graduates who can not only display linguistic competence, but are emotionally intelligent as well (Hamdzah, Subramaniam, Zainal Abidin, & Hassan, 2020). This study explores the involvement of EI in establishing improved employability based on its relationship with MUET performance among Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) undergraduates. Based on the relevant research, Dahri, Hamid, and Ismail, 2024; Jamil, Rahman and Yusuf, 2024, a conceptual model is proposed in this study, where EI competencies of self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and social skills underlie MUET performance which will further strengthen employability skills. In the current study it was observed that higher EI is positively related to MUET speaking and writing performance (Sanam & Obayed, 2025), and the dimensions of employability which consist of adaptability, communication and teamwork. The findings are envisaged to help close the assessment-workplace readiness gap and have implications for the inclusion of EI strategies within the context of language education integrations and employability frameworks of the SDG 4 agenda.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, MUET, Employability, SDG 4, TVET

Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the United Nations emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Beyond access, SDG 4 focuses on developing skills, competencies, and attitudes that enable individuals to

participate effectively in the global economy and contribute positively to society (UNESCO, 2023). In Malaysia, achieving SDG 4 requires a holistic approach that integrates not only technical and academic knowledge but also soft skills and emotional competencies essential for success in a dynamic workforce.

The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) serves as one of the key indicators of English proficiency in Malaysia. It is a high-stakes examination assessing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and is widely recognized for determining students' readiness for higher education and English language proficiency programs. Previous studies (Hamdzah, Subramaniam, Abidin, & Hassan, 2020; Ismail, Ali, & Zainuddin, 2021) confirm that MUET performance is a reliable predictor of academic success at the tertiary level. Hence, MUET is often regarded not only as a test of language competence but also as a measure of students' preparedness for academic communication and cognitive demands in higher education.

However, as the global and national labour markets evolve, questions arise regarding whether MUET alone adequately captures the competencies required for employability. Employers increasingly stress that, while technical and linguistic abilities are vital, they are insufficient without soft skills such as adaptability, empathy, teamwork, and emotional regulation. These traits are closely tied to Emotional Intelligence (EI), the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and others (Goleman, 2021). Prior research (Hamdzah, Latif, & Sulaiman, 2020; Jamil, Rahman, & Yusuf, 2024) demonstrates that EI positively influences educational engagement, resilience, and collaboration; traits that are invaluable in both academic and professional settings.

In the context of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), the integration of EI is particularly significant. TVET institutions are tasked with preparing graduates who can adapt to rapid technological change and complex work environments. Studies such as Dahri, Hamid, and Ismail (2024) and Sanam and Obayed (2025) emphasize that socio-emotional skills enhance teaching, learning, and employability outcomes, particularly by fostering adaptability, creativity, and teamwork; skills aligned with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

Despite the established connections between EI and employability, and between MUET and academic performance, limited empirical research combines both constructs within a unified framework. Few studies have examined how EI may influence MUET performance, and how MUET outcomes subsequently relate to employability readiness. Initial evidence suggests that EI can lower test anxiety, boost self-confidence, and improve communication; factors that likely enhance performance in MUET's productive components such as speaking and writing (Hamdzah et al., 2020; Jamil et al., 2024). Moreover, EI has been shown to predict employability through teamwork, adaptability, and emotional regulation (Hashim, 2024).

Objectives and Scope of the Study
This study aims to examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI), MUET performance, and graduate employability among TVET undergraduates in Malaysia. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Determine how EI competencies—self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills—affect MUET speaking and writing performance.
2. Explore how MUET performance relates to employability attributes such as adaptability, communication, and teamwork.
3. Assess whether MUET performance mediates the relationship between EI and employability readiness.

The scope of this study focuses on third-year TVET undergraduates who have completed MUET and are preparing to transition into the workforce. By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to the understanding of how emotional and linguistic competencies jointly shape employability outcomes. It also aligns with SDG 4's emphasis on holistic education—where cognitive, emotional, and social development collectively drive lifelong learning and workforce sustainability.

Literature Review
Integration of Recent Empirical Studies in Literature Review
Recent studies continue to validate the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a key driver of academic and career success. For instance, Moorthy et al. (2023) identified that EI significantly influences job performance across Malaysian industries, reinforcing its relevance in employability discussions. Similarly, Jiang et al. (2024) found that EI mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and resilience among vocational students, suggesting its potential to enhance adaptability and persistence in technical learning environments. Zhou, Peng, and Zhou (2023) further established EI as a strong mediator of employability outcomes in higher vocational settings, linking emotional competencies to career readiness. However, while these studies provide strong empirical evidence, few have examined the specific integration of EI with MUET performance as a predictor of employability, particularly among Malaysian TVET learners. This study builds upon these findings by exploring the combined influence of EI, language proficiency, and employability in alignment with the principles of SDG 4 on quality education.

While Hamdzah et al. (2020) established that EI correlates with MUET performance, newer studies such as Gamboa et al. (2023) and Zhou et al. (2023) expand this relationship by demonstrating EI's influence on employability and socio-emotional development. This study extends these insights by proposing a conceptual model where EI enhances MUET productive skills (speaking and writing) and, simultaneously, strengthens employability attributes crucial for Industry 4.0 readiness. By bridging emotional and linguistic competencies, this research advances the understanding of holistic skill formation within Malaysian TVET education systems.

Emotional Intelligence in ESL Learning
Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a concept that has been celebrated to play a significant role in student achievement at school and in the workplace. The capability of recognising, managing, and leveraging emotions towards a successful goal, defined as EI (Goleman, 2021), is closely connected to motivation, resilience, and communication abilities. Research within Malaysian localities demonstrate that EI has a sound impact on the involvement of students, their engagement in the classroom, and language mastery (Hamdzah, Latif, and Sulaiman, 2020). On the same note, global studies also revealed that the higher the level of EI, the better the

language learning results since the self-control and self-confidence were enhanced (Sadiqzade, 2024).

In the context of TVET, EI is more than semi-linguistic acquisition: it also encompasses flexibility and willingness to deal with the challenges of the workplace. Dahri, Hamid, and Ismail (2024) emphasized the value of socio-emotional competencies among TVET teachers and learners and demonstrate that employing teachers with high levels of emotional intelligence in teaching provides learners with favourable learning conditions that boost their performance. Similarly, Jamil, Rahman and Yusuf (2024) state that when EI strategies are integrated as part of the English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum, the result is more motivation, less anxiety, and better communication results. Through these researches, there is evidence that EI has dual role of facilitating language learning as well as equipping a learner with soft skills that make him eminent in an employable future.

MUET as a Standard of English Competence
Malaysian University English test (MUET) is a high-stakes examination which is applicable in university admission and college-level placement into language development programmes. MUET evaluates the skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking and has been evidenced as a valid indicator of academic success in English classes (Hamdzah, Subramaniam, Abidin, and Hassan, 20201; Ismail, Ali, and Zainuddin, 2021). Although it is centralised, students are frequently challenged during MUET preparation, such as lack of vocabulary, grammatical inadequacies, and inability to control their anxiety of tests (Karnine et al., 2022).

In addition to its measurement of technical skill, MUET has the washback effects on teaching and learning. It has been revealed that the MUET preparation tends to create test-centred instructional methods instead of communication strategies, in the way that it could inhibit the usage of true language (Rahman et al., 2023). Meanwhile, new research has proposed that digital intervention, including chatbot-guided MUET preparation, can lead to increased student confidence and performance (Tang and Hanif, 2024). Although MUET is a strong assessment tool, its lack of success in assessing more general competencies such as adaptability, empathy, and collaboration suggest it is necessary to consider alternative constructs such as EI to evaluate the readiness of graduates.

Soft Skills and Employability in TVET
However, graduate employability remains one of the central issues in Malaysia and other countries of the world, particularly, in the wake of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Micromanagers focus on communication, groupwork, and emotional control in addition to technical skills more and more (Hashim, 2024). Studies have affirmed that EI plays an important role in these employability factors and Bano and Vasantha (2022) reported that EI dimensions are significant predictors of the final-year student on their employability regulations. In equivalent ways, Sanam and Obayed (2025) provided that students in TVET at higher levels of EI engagement were more adaptable and collaborative, which qualified them to work in the 4IR-based workplaces.

In the Malaysian TVET scorecard, both the level of professionalism and the emotional prowess has been attributed to the concept of employability. According to Ismail et al. (2021), the role of English language competency is not being replaced by new technologies and studies,

instead graduates should be equipped not only with minimal languages but also with a strong level of emotional stability and social adjustability (Jamil et al., 2024). This mix is becoming mandatory with graduates of TVET that are required to adapt easily to multicultural and technologically sophisticated working conditions.

The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence, MUET and Employability
Despite a long-standing body of research on the topic of EI and employability, as well as proven validity of MUET as an indicator of academic success, few studies research correlate the three constructs as a unit. Early research shows that EI positively influences the language work older than MUET as it leads to anxiety and the development of confidence in communication (Hamdzah et al., 2020). At the same time, EI was also proven to have a direct positive effect on employability by making students more adaptable and providing the job skills in the form of interpersonal skills that are appreciated by employers (Sanam and Obayed, 2025). However, the mediating effect of MUET to the correlation between EI and employability has never been thoroughly studied.

This is one of the major research gaps since MUET is still a vital component of the Malaysian higher education system, and EI and employability are becoming among the most crucial factors to reach the SDG 4 goal of quality education (UNESCO, 2023). Such a gap will be closed when resourceful to understand precisely the interplay between emotional and linguistic abilities to influence graduate preparedness within TVET institutions in a more holistic way.

Proposed Conceptual Model
The conceptual model places Emotional Intelligence as a cause of both the performances of MUET and graduate employability. Emotional Intelligence entails self awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social capability, as well as motivation. It has been theorised to increase productive results in language to reduce anxiety over test, maintain effort and facilitate a more productive interaction process during speaking and writing related activities, which is expected to have stronger results in MUET (Hamdzah et al., 2020; Jamil, Rahman, and Yusuf, 2024). MUET enjoys popularity in Malaysia as a measure of academic English proficiency and higher levels of MUET success are likely to be carried into the area of more direct workplace communication and documentation which are valued by employers (Ismail, Ali, and Zainuddin, 2021).

Simultaneously, Emotional Intelligence is also predicted to directly influence employability by empowering the students with flexibility, resilience, and adaptability required in the modern TVET connected working environment (Bano and Vasantha, 2020; Dahri, Hamid, and Ismail, 2022). By the way of crucially combining these routes, the model suggests that MUET mediates the correlation of Emotional Intelligence with employability partially. Emotional Intelligence reinforces the communicative competence summed up in MUET as well as one that non-cognitive provision in the test that is not quantified has yielded parallel paths to workplace preparedness. The test of this integrated structure fills a knowledge gap in earlier research that in most cases tested these connexons among themselves instead of assessing the quality education SDG 4 agenda that trains substantially related skills (goods and services) essential to lifelong learning and decent work (UNESCO, 2023).
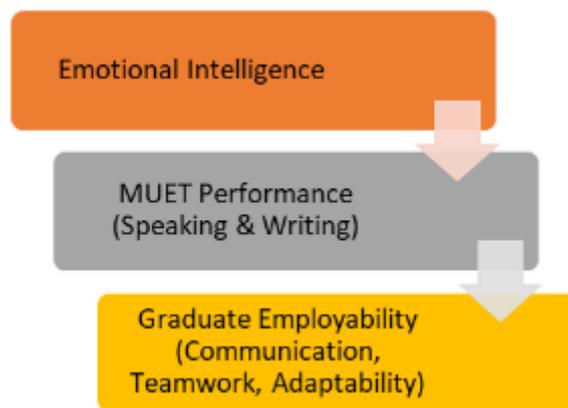
Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Relationship of EI, MUET Performance and Graduate Employability

Methodology
Study Context
The current research has taken a qualitative, interview-based approach since the questions have requested explanations of how and reasons as to why Emotional Intelligence has influenced MUET experiences and a sense of employability, not estimates of effect sizes. The use of semi structured interviews has ensured that the participants tell situated storeys using their own words with sufficient depth to be interpreted carefully which has conformed to the modern-day recommendation on the application of reflexive thematic analysis in both education and the social sciences (Braun and Clarke, 2024; Ahmed, 2025). The design has done so, as well, by implementing the current suggestions making the process visible as advised of trustful qualitative research, not to mention making it directly connected to evidence in support of credibility, reliability, and applicable findings (Riazi, 2023; Ahmed, 2024). The study has also made use of revised syntheses of saturation and information power in planning the sample that demonstrate a relatively targeted focus and a modest number of rich interviews is achievable by the targeted cohort when richly performed (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022; Squire et al., 2024). A cumulative result of these decisions is that they have pre-empted the voices of participants without compromising methodological effectiveness which would suit an educational psychology and ESL investigation.

Research Design and Sampling
This paper has taken the form of qualitative interview-based design to discover the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and MUET experience and perceived employability among TVET undergraduate. The purposive sampling technique has been used to recruit 24 third year degree students who have already taken MUET and were pursuing English courses since they are near graduation and would be able to relate results of the tests in relation within the occupational context. The sampling has tried to achieve a credible diversity of the views due to the variation by programme, MUET bands, and gender. Recruitment has been made until new information will no longer be brought into the research by a significant margin and all of this is led by the principle of information power which consider that a clear purpose, well-defined sample, and substantial discussion qualifies the basis of a medium but adequate sample size (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data Collection
One to one semi structured interviews have offered a set of standardised prompts as well as the flexibility of elaboration in their own words in a format that offers some comparability with depth and is generally highly recommended in current qualitative advice. All interviews have been about thirty to sixty minutes long and have either taken place in person or via secure video conferencing, audio taped and transcribed verbatim with consent. The protocol has consented accounts of MUET preparation and performance in speaking as well as writing, incidences when emotion regulation has proven to be beneficial or perplexing to performance, perceived connexion to team work, communication, and flexibility in course work or internship. The field notes have also recorded some contextual cues and reflexive observations that they can be used later on to aid in interferences of the same. These steps follow the contemporary best practices of reflexive thematic work and new advice regarding planning information rich interviewing and sufficient qualitative adequacy (Braun and Clarke, 2024; Hennink and Kaiser, 2022).

Data Analysis
Reflexive thematic analysis has been analysed in chronological order; first familiarisation to the analysis, then coding, then theme generation, followed by reviewing, and finally naming of themes, both considering semantic content and underlying meanings behind the Emotional Intelligence, MUET, and employability model analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2024). Coding has integrated knowledge on data-based observations and knowledge on regulations, self-awareness, empathy, and social skill through theory-informed consideration. In keeping with reflexive TA, approaches have been centred on the interpretive, recurrent process of coding, not a reliability practise, and documenting shifts in interpretation and theme development by writing analytic memos and maintaining an audit trail (Byrne, 2022; Braun and Clarke, 2024). As a reinforcement of the coherence aspect, sample-coded extracts have been discussed by comparing them (not inter-coder agreement statistics) to identify interpretive tensions, which have been resolved via peer debriefs, and themes have been established that best represented patterned meaning in the corpus.

Ethical Considerations
Credibility and trustworthiness have been facilitated via an audit trail of a procedure, peer-to-peer debriefing preceding a finalisation of themes, and a personal short reflection of the selected members where selections have responded to a rough interpretation. To facilitate transferability, we have employed thick description; to facilitate the high standards of confirmability, we have adopted the reflexive position, which is consistent with other existing principles of qualitative rigour (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Braun and Clarke, 2021). The host institution has printed their ethical approval. Participation has been voluntary without penalty, all the people involved have given informal consent, the secrecy of data has been guaranteed by the use of pseudonyms and data have been kept safely in access-controlled rages.

Results and Discussion
Table 4 displays the coded themes, sub codes, are quotation examples, and frequencies of twenty four undergraduates in their third year. The table has already provided a rough map of the intersections of Emotional Intelligence with the MUET experiences and beliefs of employability, and most of the interviewed respondents said that in the offered model they

might fit in the strategies and reflections. Each theme is interpreted in the discussion below with regard to meaning in context and the patterns are connected to current scholarship that has been discussing language performance, emotional processes, and graduate preparedness both in higher education and TVET settings. This combined presentation of results and discussion has the intention of keeping the line of analysis in perspective and to make it clear how the qualitative data is connected to the proposed conceptual connections in this study.

Emotional Intelligence with MUET experiences and beliefs of employability

Code	Subcodes	Representative Quote	Participants	Percentage (%)	MUET Link	Employability Link
4.1 Emotional regulation and MUET	Breathing routines; Positive self-talk; Cognitive reframing; Time focus	I have learned to breathe slowly before Task A and my speech is now more consistent with less stammering.	18	75	Speaking delivery and pacing; Writing time management	Stress management under time pressure
4.2 Self-awareness, motivation, practice	Reflective notes; Error logs; Targeted goals; Peer pairing	After each mock paper I have noted my recurring errors and set a small goal for the next week.	20	83	Writing coherence and accuracy; Speaking confidence	Self-directed learning; Persistence
4.3 Empathy and social skills	Active listening; Summarising; Turn taking; Role negotiation	I have tried to summarise my teammates point before adding mine and the group discussion has gone smoother.	17	71	Interactive speaking; Audience awareness	Teamwork; Customer facing communication
4.4 MUET perceptions and washback	Benchmark value; Template driven drill; Authentic tasks preference	MUET has given me a clear target, but only drilling templates has not helped me in real discussions.	16	67	Goal setting; Risk of over templating speaking and writing	Transfer to authentic workplace communication
4.5 Integrative summary for model	Indirect EI to MUET; Direct EI to Employability; Partial mediation	Managing my emotions has helped my MUET tasks, and empathy has helped me work better during internship.	14	58	Speaking fluency; Writing focus	Collaboration; Adaptability

Affective regulation in MUET speaking and writing.
Strategies practised by participants in MUET speaking and writing have included slowing the respiratory rate, rapid verbal self-talk and rapid cognitive reappraisal in stressful situations. Learners have commented on greater consistency on Task A and Task B; improved articulation; greater pace consistency; improved concentration; improved ability to control pacing and improves writing. Hence, there is compelling evidence in the literature of significant and positive effects of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on language performance. This influence is mediated through students' ability to cope with emotions and persevere through high-stakes assessment situations. Consequently, as referred by Hamdzah et al. (2020) and Jamil, Rahman and Yusuf (2024), the concept of positive regulation could assist in coping with the anxiety reduction and attentional focus. This finding is supported by similar research about the effects of test-related stress. A recent study on language testing for example confirmed the important role of regulation and self-monitoring as factors that contribute to more fluent performance during productive tasks. Researchers validate that this particular way of teaching is great for TVET groups tackling the MUET speaking and writing parts (Ismail, Ali and Zainuddin, 2021).

Self-awareness, motivation, and deliberate practice. Assurance, drive and practise.
After the mock papers they've written short reflection notes, made notes about what they've done wrong and set themselves some targets they must achieve by the end of the week. Some have developed intentional pairs based on their practise, such as a coherence-strong and lexical-range-strong pairing. Participants have described how an improved understanding of triggers, and strengths through heightened self-awareness has led to making intention, and increasing state readiness over time. This has conformed to those that have linked EI to unrelenting participation, productive work and the dynamic pursuit of support in learning a language with thinking and planning being instrumental in the creation of productive abilities (Jamil, Rahman and Yusuf, 2024). Furthermore, in the framework of the recent studies of self-regulation in EAP, the reflection activity of setting goals was associated with the enhanced organization of written work and the better presentation of oral tasks (Ismail, Ali, and Zainuddin, 2021), which correlates with the creation of narratives mentioned in the MUET settings.

Caring, Inter-Personal Skills and Team Spirit
Respondents identified empathy and social skills with positive collaborative work on coursework and feeling more comfortable reaching out for help in the workplace. Children have studied listening skills such as how to listen effectively, summarise an item being presented by another pupil, and how to negotiate roles in a more natural way while working together in groups. It is these experiences that have been linked to greater feelings of preparation in internships and early jobs (partially in team work but also in work that involves interaction with customers). Collectively, findings from this line of work have fed into the conceptualisation of EI as an important employability attribute. In facing the challenge of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, EI functions as the primary driver in communication, collaboration and awareness to TVET context and all related fields that require the graduate willingness (Bano and Vasantha, 2022; Dahri, Hamid and Ismail, 2024; Sanam and Obayed, 2025). Taken together, these threads of evidence suggest interpersonal aspects of Emotional Intelligence represent an alternate path to employability that is neither fully reflected nor captured by standardised MUET scores.

Benefits and Washback Perceptions of MUET and MUET.
Students have found MUET to be an unequivocal yardstick for where they have been and where they need to be, providing specific targets and a measure of progress that has engendered a sense of confidence and has been effective in focussing preparations. At the same time, some participants have noticed that very high test orientation sometimes has reduced drilling to models and stock phrases, thus preventing spontaneous production and natural communication in the target language. The impact of high-stakes language examinations such as MUET on practises in the classroom and on learner behavioural outcomes is a subject of much debate. As reported by Rahman et al. (2023), research proves the ambiguity occurs which are either facilitating or constraining which impacts the students.

Post interview position was that preparation for MUET, including MUET-oriented exercises, and coaching and guided discussion exercises that addressed affective issues, was desirable. Despite this ambivalence, this position is in no way mutually exclusive with the established utility of MUET. The application of the examination can at the same time be an effective criterion for selection into universities and to provide a valid indicator of a learner's readiness for the communicative and collaborative aspects of a tertiary environment (Ismail, Ali and Zainuddin, 2021).

Integrative Summary Versus Model
Emotional Intelligence has been shown to work in two complementary directions: The latter is the indirect route, where MUET speaking and writing are reinforced by self-regulation and self-awareness through relaxed performance (delivery), pacing, and revision. Furthermore, there is some evidence to propose the existence of a first-hand developmental path, through the development of empathy and social skills, and through the acquisition of professional communication, collaborative behaviour and confidence, independent of a formal MUET score.

All of these qualitative trends have led to the development, in part, of a mediation theory of cognition that considers both language and non-cognitive resources on the measure of cognitive ability which represents the core of work readiness. In our pedagogical approach we demonstrate convergence with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on Quality Education. This is implemented through the execution of learning ecosystems which pursue to form the academic competences and widen the predominant skills that provide the fundamental for lifelong learning and rewarding jobs (UNESCO, 2023)

Conclusion
The study has proven that EI is greatly related with MUET achievements and perceived workability among third-year TVET undergraduates. An interview during the interview has demonstrated two complementary directions. First, self-control and awareness of self-consciousness has provided the foundation of a more relaxed delivery, more conscious pace and more goal-orientated revision in MUET speaking and writing, which are comparable to results of associating emotional processes to language performance during high-stakes testing (Hamdzah et al., 2020; Jamil, Rahman, and Yusuf, 2024). Second, Emphasis and Collaborative behaviour in terms of empathy and social skills have altered collaborative behaviour and professional communication in the Coursework andinternships, which reflect the finding that Emotional Intelligence creates employability because of the interpersonal and

adaptation strengths that are valued in contemporary workplaces (Bano and Vasantha, 2022; Dahri, Hamid, and Ismail, 2024; Sanam and Obayed, 2025). MUET still emerges as a valid metric of academic English proficiency but not an effective approach in reflecting the wider socio-emotional resources that relate to work readiness, as is in line with other contemporary predictive-validity studies of tertiary learning (Ismail, Ali, and Zainuddin, 2021; Baharum et al., 2021). When the results are put together, an only partially mediated perception of Emotional Intelligence as a facilitator of MUET performance and a direct influence on employability was found. Since quality education is a sustainable development goal with a priority on number four, the results are that quality education constitutes the development of cognitive proficiency and socio-emotional ability to lifelong learning and decent work (UNSD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Three aspects can be pursued in future research to develop these insights. To begin with, a programme-evaluation or longitudinal qualitative design that monitors the movement of some self-regulation routines, self-talk prompts, and collaborative practices which were instigated during MUET preparation to coursework, internships, and initial work experiences will be appropriate; these designs do not increase assertions about mechanism and transfer (Braun and Clarke, 2024; Byrne, 2022). The second option is to test the model on a large scale, to correlate the official MUET component scores with the validated measures of Emotional Intelligence and employability. This research may help to investigate whether the indirect relationship between Emotional Intelligence and MUET and employability is generalised in programmes and institutions, and also whether the trend differs by attributes of cohort such as previously having English exposure. Even recent vocational samples demonstrate that Emotional Intelligence is connected to the sense of employability and can be a mediator in the processes of development (Zhou, Peng, and Zhou, 2023). Third, both align outcome measures with the literature of existing employability taxonomies that forecast communication skills with a foreground, teamwork, adapting to change, problem solving and self-efficacy and thereby connect the design of the interventions to sector expectations and national reporting based on SDG 4 indicators (Tushar et al., 2023; UNSD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). Transparent, reflexive qualitative processes, including audit trails, analytic memos, and peer reviews, should be employed in these directions, as the currently existing guidance suggests to exhibit the credibility and reliability of future work (Braun and Clarke, 2024; Byrne, 2022).

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