

# Examining Chinese Independent Secondary School Teachers' Emotional Intelligence And Coping Responses During The Covid-19 Pandemics: Protocol Of A Cross-Sectional Study

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## Abstract:

The coronavirus diseases (COVID-19) can be described as an acute respiratory disease, caused by a novel coronavirus that has not been previously detected in humans. The pandemics have a dramatic impact on diverse population and the whole economies of the world. Alongside, most of the schools in the worldwide have also experience challenges such as remodelled of teaching and learning methodologies from classroom learning to online learning as one of the strategies of controlling the spread of COVID-19 in the school settings. A review presented that many teachers are at risk for emotional regulation issues, stress, anxiety, and depression. To reduce the literature gaps, the current study attempted to propose a protocol to guide more targeted assessment on Chinese Independent Secondary School (CISS) teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) and coping responses (CR) in Malaysia context. The protocol introduces the current issues, methodologies, as well as the statistical analysis procedures of the research. The researchers also suggested adapting as well as forward and backward translating the existing measurement instruments, which are the Situational Test of Emotional Understanding (STEU) Brief-Cope inventory, Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSREI) to ensure these measurement instruments are suitable to apply among the CISS teachers. The protocol is important as it provides a framework to guide more targeted assessment for educators who are teaching in CISS. The study protocol is useful in guiding the schools to re-examine the needs of teachers in CISS. It also provides a new orientation for intervention programmes to assist CISS teachers developing healthier emotional management and coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemics.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Coping Responses, Chinese Independent Secondary School, Teachers, COVID-19

## Introduction

Teaching tasks are undeniably stressful and full of challenges, while the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemics have intensified teachers' stress, anxiety and depression (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Exploring teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) and coping responses (CR) are especially needed in this difficult time. EI skills can be developed throughout life, for example, acquired through formal or informal learning, social interaction, as well as from coping experiences. In general, EI can be described as the capability to perceive, express, use, understand, as well as manage emotions (Cherniss, 2010; Mayer et al., 1999). Current study assumed that low EI among educators could be reflected during cooperating with other colleagues, facilitating students' learning experiences and performing appropriate emotional management in educational circumstance and therefore caused serious problems in education. In past decades, central metaphor for emotion is its portrayal as an irrational force and stressful emotional arousal that drives people to perform unpredictable behaviours (Ciarrochi et al., 2006). Even if emotions could have exerted negative effects in life, but it can also serve useful functions in everyday life. For example, emotions are very important source of energy that regulates peoples' lives and behaviours. It determines what people are drawn to, believes in and committed to. Adaptive roles of emotion begin to garner attention in current literatures. Increasingly, researchers are recognizing this misjudge on its qualities, and calling for work to investigate how emotion impacts cognitive and emotional functioning. Understanding as much as possible about the EI and CR are important for educators, so that they are fully prepared to cope with disturbance and resistance within wider education contexts.

## Problem statements and study rationale

Chinese education has preserved a complete system in both Chinese independent schools and most of the government schools. With a history of more than 200 years, the demands on Chinese education dramatically increase around the world. Review the past, Chinese courses not only provided in Chinese school, while also includes in certain national primary, secondary, and tertiary schools in Malaysia. As demonstrated by Ngang and See (2013) in the research, the required needs and actual needs for assistance and resources received by the Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school (CISS) teachers were still at moderate level. The lack of school support and assistance could impact a teacher's performance and satisfaction at workplace. Not to mention the recent challenges facing by this population and the negative impacts of COVID-19 pandemics on their working performance and emotional well-being.

The pandemics are not in control which causing huge transform of educational systems around the world, from face-to-face teaching to online learning (Collie, 2021). These changes created a new topic for educators around the world, including Malaysia. Often without any training, teachers have pivoted to implement online classes and must supervise all students to ensure they are in right track, motivate them, and keep them in connection. Under the huge pressures of the pandemics, educators' stress might have been overwhelmed by increasing workload, poor emotional management, and coping skills as well as limited access to social support.

While the school is raided by COVID virus, they are also expected to

hinder spreading of COVID-19 while performing teaching duties (Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021). The dual role of educating and virus controlling in school had undeniably increased teachers' concern regarding their personal safety and health consequences. As evidenced, the unsecure feeling and anxiety during the pandemics had led to high emotional reactions and poor psychological well-being among teachers (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2020; Sokal et al., 2020).

Current study assumed that teachers' EI skills might function as a buffer in preventing psychological problems and predicting a healthier coping style while dealing with burdensome tasks. From a psychological perspective, emotional experiences linked to almost all major forms of psychopathology (Mackenzie & Watt, 2012). In essence, increase individual's emotional ability to maintain or enhance his or her inner equilibrium after exposing to threatening environment might serve as an adaptive coping functioning in life. Align with the studies of Sadovyy et al. (2021), they have confirmed that the role of EI to work as predictor for effective working performance and occupational well-being. EI could be a critical skill to understand own and others' emotions, which in turn may facilitate the use of healthy coping strategies and positive emotions rather than being impact by pandemics (e.g., depression, sadness, fear, or insecurity).

Despite it play a significant role in working environment, yet a review showed that very limited studies have investigated the effect of EI on CISS teachers' CR during the COVID 19 outburst. To reduce the literature gap, the current study will explore CISS teachers' EI on CR as well as other demographic factors that might influence the

emotional and coping aspects. The second gap is the cultural appropriateness and applicability of EI and Cope measurement instruments in Malaysia context. In Malaysian Context, it is found that most of the EI and Cope assessments were translated from English to Bahasa Malaysia instead of Chinese language (Tharbe & Ng, 2017; Yusoff, 2011). Also, the review on previous research reflected a very limited investigation on examining the suitability of EI and COPE assessments among Malaysian Chinese population using the CB-SEM and PLS-SEM analysis. To reduce the practical gap, the study decided to adapt, translate (English to Chinese language) and back translate (Chinese to English language) the measurement instruments to ensure that these selected instruments are suitable and valid to apply among selected population. The current study is significant because it will serve as a steppingstone of exploring CISS teachers' emotional abilities and CR, so that further recommendation or prevention can be implemented among this population.

### **Research Objectives:**

1. Adaptation and back-to-back translate the Situational Test of Emotional Understanding (STEU) Brief-Cope inventory, Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSREI).
2. Examine the reliability and validity of STEU, Brief-Cope inventory and SSREI through content validity index (CVI), factor analysis (FA), Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) and PLS-SEM.
3. Examine the significant relationship between CISS teachers' EI and CR.
4. Examine the significant effect of gender, age, marital status, and level of workload on CISS teachers' EI and CR.

## Conceptual Framework

The initial concept of EI was proposed by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990 (as cited in Santrock, 2011). Basically, their concept of EI defined the EI as the core element of social intelligence that included the capability to distinguish emotions, administer one's own and others' emotions and feelings, and use of emotions to guide an individual's thinking and behaviours (as cited in Akduman et al., 2015). In present, EI can be more important than conventional intelligence quotient (IQ) to success in this modern society. EI emphasizes more on the value of non-intellectual abilities and attributes for success in living such as emotional management, adaptive coping, empathy, self-awareness, adaptive adjustment, among others. EI also indicates the understanding the antecedents and consequences of emotion, where these emotions come from, as well as how to regulate toxic emotions to ensure the very best results for every concerned party.

Coping is conceptualized as constantly modify or alter cognitive and behavioural style with an effort to deal with internal and external demands that are perceive as stressful or threatening (Abdullah et al., 2010; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). During this COVID-19 outburst, coping is said to be an essential factor that will determine the success of adjustment among educators in Malaysia. As a matter of fact, the way educators appraise the threatening context will influence their decisions on the selection of the most appropriate coping strategy to apply with the situation. Carver and researchers (1989) further argued the initial concept of coping established by Folkman and Lazarus' coping model, seems to be too plain and lack of representation of human's coping. Regarding this, they further

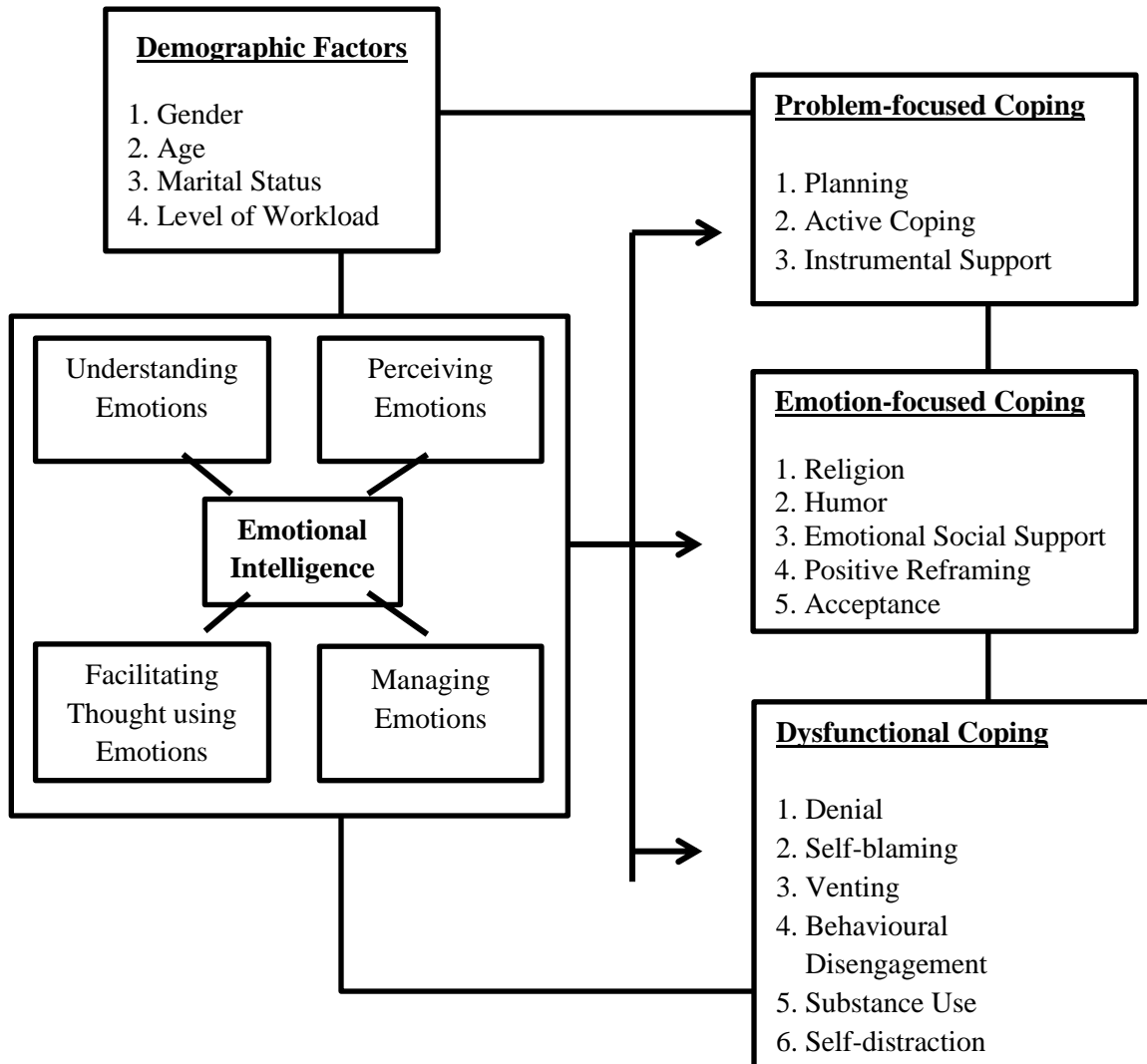
proposed four type of coping that included (a) problem focused coping, with five sub-dimensions that are active coping, suppression of competing activities, planning, seeking social support for instrumental reasons and restraint coping, (b) emotion-focused coping, with four sub-dimensions such as seeking social support for emotional reasons, positive reinterpretation and growth, focusing on and venting of emotions, and turning to religion, (c) dysfunctional coping strategies, with 2 sub-dimensions involved helplessness and behavioural disengagement and (d) primary appraisal with two sub-dimensions that are denial and acceptance.

However, due to the overall time burden of the assessment, finally the authors revised again the original protocol assessment from COPE to Brief-Cope to reduce impatient and exhaustion factors that might influence the respondents' response accuracy while answering the assessment (García et al., 2018). The Brief Cope consisted of three main CR where the problem-focused coping comprised only three dimensions (Active Coping, Planning, and Instrumental Support), emotion-focused coping consisted of five dimensions (Religion, Humor, Emotional Social Support, Positive Reframing, and Acceptance) and the last is the dysfunctional coping, contained of six dimensions (Denial, Self-blaming, Venting, Behavioural Disengagement, Substance Use, and Self-distraction). The conceptual framework of current research was illustrated in the Figure 1. The present study hypothesized that EI would allow educators to cooperate better with others, use adaptive coping, and are able to function effectively on their own because EI provides the fundamental upon which the intellectual portion of the brain can be functioned to its fullest degree.

## Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the study



### Emotional Intelligence

EI emerged as a hot topic in modern-day psychological research. It garners attention of many mental health specialist and researchers after the outburst of COVID-19 pandemics. Initially, the concept of EI was developed by Peter Salovey & John Mayer in 1990 (as cited in Schutte et al., 1998). They introduced this intelligence through several media such as articles publications, and soon the interest on EI has finally grasped the attention of public

and scientific research communities. This model emphasized on four emotional abilities that are perceptions of emotions, understand of emotions, utilization of emotions, and manage emotions. The core of EI consisted of these 4 components (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006; Mayer et al., 1999). Perception of emotions can be explained as the ability to accurately perceive inputting emotional information such as interpret facial expressions, gestures, postures, tones of voice correctly. The second component,

understand of emotions included aware of the emergence, meaning, and changing of the emotions while interact with others. The third component, utilize of emotions involved use of positive and negative emotions to enhance cognitive processing. Lastly, the most critical component, management of emotions involved the ability to self-regulate as well as regulate others' emotions.

### **Appraisal and Transactional Processes**

Lazarus and Folkman's transactional stress and coping model defined coping as the continuously modifying emotional, behavioural, and mental efforts to manage any form of external and internal malicious stimuli which appraised as challenging, threatening, and unfavourable (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The model proposes coping as process approach rather than trait-oriented. Trait-oriented is to assess the disposition, whereas process approach attempts to identify one's thoughts and behaviours when confronting with stressful context. Lazarus and Folkman believed that coping is process-oriented because most often coping efforts a) transform or alter over certain timeline b) depend on the nature of context, and c) preferences of coping strategies differ in variety of circumstances (Schoenmakers et al., 2015).

Coping has management as well as remedial aims. The significant placed on appraisal in the transactional stress and coping model demonstrated that stress is triggered by individuals' perception, rather than the nature of event, that determines whether CR are initiated and whether the stressful event is eventually resolved. Since stress is often associated with the onset of distress and disorders, an in-depth knowledge on the nature of appraisals allows mental health professionals to examine a person

perception and their preferred coping patterns in mitigating the demanding encounter.

Generally, this model has two specific appraisals, which are primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal involves individual's cognitive evaluation on an event to determine whether the situation have potential hazard or irrelevant to his or her well-being. More specifically, this appraisal process can be differentiated into three appraisals: 1) irrelevant (of no relevant or adverse impact to well-being/health), 2) benign-positive (pleasurable and improve one's well-being), and 3) stressful (denotes harm, damage, or loss) (Jamieson et al., 2017). Perceive of irrelevant and benign-positive on events or stimulus will not trigger further CR or negative emotions, except the stressful appraisals. Stress appraisals are generated when the stressor or event is cognitively perceived along a continuum ranging from uncomfortable to adversely influencing the one's well-being. It is different from challenge appraisals as the challenge appraisals emphasis more on uncovering the internal sources of strength to reduce personal problems of living and is often characterized by positive emotions.

Second appraisal involves the evaluation of the existing resources available to cope with stressful events. The term of "secondary" doesn't mean that this appraisal is less influential, unique or place after the primary appraisals. Instead, the complexity and emergence of coping process implicating the synchronous intertwine between primary and secondary appraisals. Coping is enacted when an event is perceived as malicious (primary appraisals) and requires efforts (secondary appraisals) to manage or eliminate the source of stress. This theory illustrates how a particular form of coping

strategies may be used for different functions, depending on the context. Within this theory, problem-focused coping (PFC) is directed at managing the stressful sources, while the emotion-focused coping (EFC) attempts at regulating emotions arise as a consequence of the stressor. Oftentimes, if the stressful situation is manageable and controllable, people prone to adopt the problem-focused coping including face the challenges, acquire new skills or knowledge, find alternative solutions to deal with situational crisis. If the situation is irreversible or unmanageable, people tend to use emotional-focused coping to deal with frustration.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The design of the study is a cross-sectional design. The cross-sectional design is more suitable to use in this study as it can be conducted through survey in a short period. The design is usually conducted to examine the prevalence of the interested outcome among a subgroup (Levin, 2006). In Malaysia, there are approximately 63 Malaysian Chinese independent secondary schools (CISS).

### **Sampling Method**

To ensure the generalizability of the study, cluster sampling methods will be used to select the potential respondents for the study. The CISS will be written into 63 pieces of paper and putting into a box. Subsequently, the researchers will randomly choose 32 schools as the location of study. For the inclusive criteria, all the respondents must be the CISS teachers under healthy conditions. Other public and private sector teachers who are not working under the CISS or CISS teachers with disabling physical conditions or under infections of Covid-19 will be

excluded in the study. As recommended by Louangrath (2017), a minimum of 200 sample sizes are required to generate fair representation of the population so that accurate statistic calculation could be carried out for population inference. The G\* Power software will be utilized to determine the accurate number of respondents to be included in the study.

### **Research Procedures**

After selection, the researchers will email potential respondents to answer the questionnaire. Consent will be taken by suitable trained investigators. All potential participants can freely volunteer themselves to the study. During the assessment process, the researchers will be guided the respondents in filling the inform consent form and questionnaire after briefing regarding the objectives of the research. All selected respondents are required to complete the assessment within 25 minutes. At baseline, all the background information of respondents will be collected, analysed, and presented in the table form. The information includes the sociodemographic data such as races, marital status, age, and level of workload.

### **Translation the measurement instruments**

Current study will adapt three instruments for the research. The first instrument, STEU was by MacCann and Roberts (2008) to examine the own and other's emotional understanding. The instrument comprised of 42 questions with 5 possible reactions. The Cronbach's alpha of the STEU was .63. Current research will use STEU as complementary test because emotion understanding is one of the important components in EI, which is not yet included in SSREI. The second instrument to

be used is the SSREI. SSREI consisted of 33 items with purpose of examine an individual's EI using the Salovey and Mayer (1990) EI model (as cited in Gilles et al., 2005). The instrument reported a rating of .90 for internal consistency. The last assessment instrument is the Brief-Cope, a short version of the COPE inventory aims to investigate CR. In present, this instrument has been identified as one of the best validated and is widely apply to measure CR (García et al., 2018).

To ensure the measurement instruments are suitable to use and apply among CISS teachers, the adapted and translated STEU, Brief-Cope inventory, and SSREI will be established for this population. The following steps were used as guideline to forward and backward translate the measurement instruments: (1) consult with experts regarding the suitability and validity of each item for selected population, (2) forward translation of STEU, brief-cope inventory, and SSREI into Chinese language, (3) backward translation of translated Chinese language assessment instruments into the English language, (4) prepare content validation form of each measurement instrument for experts, (5) review feedbacks, and (6) re-modification and finalization of the STEU, brief-cope inventory, and SSREI. Written permission from the original authors will be obtained before any adaptation and translation on instruments.

### **Content Validity Index**

Generally, a systematic method to ensure the content validity of measurement instruments can be obtained based on experts' feedbacks and evaluation. The content validity can be explained as the degree to which items of the measurement instrument are able to represent or related to a particular assessment purpose (Yusoff, 2019). Based on

the recommendation from Gilbert and Prion (2016), approximately five to 10 experts involve in the content evaluation is ideal to achieve the content validation purposes, while three to four experts are acceptable, yet more than ten experts might exceed the requirements for the validation purposes. In the current study, the researchers will recruit 5 experts to validate the adapted instruments. After recruitment, the researchers will prepare each panel the content validation form. Independent of other experts, each panellist will be asked to mark and comment the degree of relevance of every item provided in the form, ranging from 1 "the item is not relevant to the measurement domain" to 4 "the item is highly relevant to the measurement domain." This process is very important stage in the forward and backward translation as well as the adaptation process as it will determine the overall reliability, validity, and applicability of the measurement instruments to the selected population. For the calculation methods, the researchers will examine the content validity of individual items (I-CVI) and content validity of overall scale (S-CVI) of the measurement instruments. To control the inflated values of CVI, the researchers will also examine the Kappa Statistic Coefficient to detect and reduce the possibility of chance agreement. Calculation can be done using the following formula  $PC = \frac{N!}{A!(N-A)!} \times 5N$ . Hereupon, the N represents the number of experts and A is the agreement of experts on the relevance of items. After calculating the probability of chance agreement, the following step is to examine the Kappa using the formula:  $K = (I-CVI - PC) / (1 - PC)$ . If the value is less than .39, the items will be removed as this might indicated that that particular item is a problematic item that could affect the overall validity of the measurement instruments.



## **Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

After checking the content validity index of each item, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) will be applied to organize items into meaningful dimensionality and identify factors to be extracted in each of the measurement instruments. To ensure the appropriateness of data before analysing the EFA, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity will be checked in the analysis. Regarding this, Leech, Barrett, and Morgan (2014) suggested the KMO measure to exceed .70. For the next step, the validity testing will be conducted through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) approach and PLS-SEM. Although it is not necessary to include both CB-SEM and PLS-SEM analysis in validity testing, but these two approaches somehow serve as complementary functions which will bring more valuable insight on exploring the structural relationship of measurement instruments (Dash & Paul, 2021).

## **Final Statistical Analysing Procedures**

The final stage of the research is to apply the adapted measurement instruments on the CISS teachers. Pearson correlation will be used to examine the third research objective: the significant relationship between CISS teachers' EI and CR. Lastly, the Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) will be applied to analyse the research objective four: the significant effect of gender, age, marital status, and level of workload on CISS teachers' EI and CR.

## **Discussion**

Deficiency in emotional literacy can cause plenty of problems such as disheartenment, devastation, and harm. Many researchers have long realized that there is a dire need to

implement a course for EI education in educational settings. Thus far, notable of studies have confirmed the effectiveness of EI intervention in facilitating emotional sensitivity, emotional regulation, emotional utilization, and emotional appraisal of an individual (Bagheri, Kosnin, & Besharat, 2016; Kotsou, Nelis, Grégoire & Mikolajczak, 2011; Nithya, 2017). Current study noted a trend in EI intervention studies reviewed that examine EI level, coaching, assigning homework, and practicing are critical components to increase the EI skills.

Despite the main role of teachers is to enhance positive learning experiences of students, yet teachers are also required to handle their student better as well as to be responsive to various teaching duties. Wong et al., (2022) reported that Malaysian teachers who are lack of resources, support and guidance are more likely to experience stress while delivering their teaching. Maintain positive psychological and emotional states of teachers are critical to ensure they are ready to cope with difficult situations. As recommended, the current study aimed to relook at the needs of teachers, especially among the CISS teachers. More specifically, the research will examine CISS teachers' EI and CR in Malaysia context.

The number of respondents proposed in the study is acceptable to generate valid and reliable results in exploratory factor analysis, CB-SEM, and PLS-SEM analysis. The validation procedures for adapted instruments were illustrated in figure 2. Three measurement instruments will use to collect data that are the STEU, Brief-Cope inventory, and SSREI. Through this research, the researchers able to modified and re-check the selected instruments' content validity, composite validity, discriminant validity and reliability. This statistical procedure will help

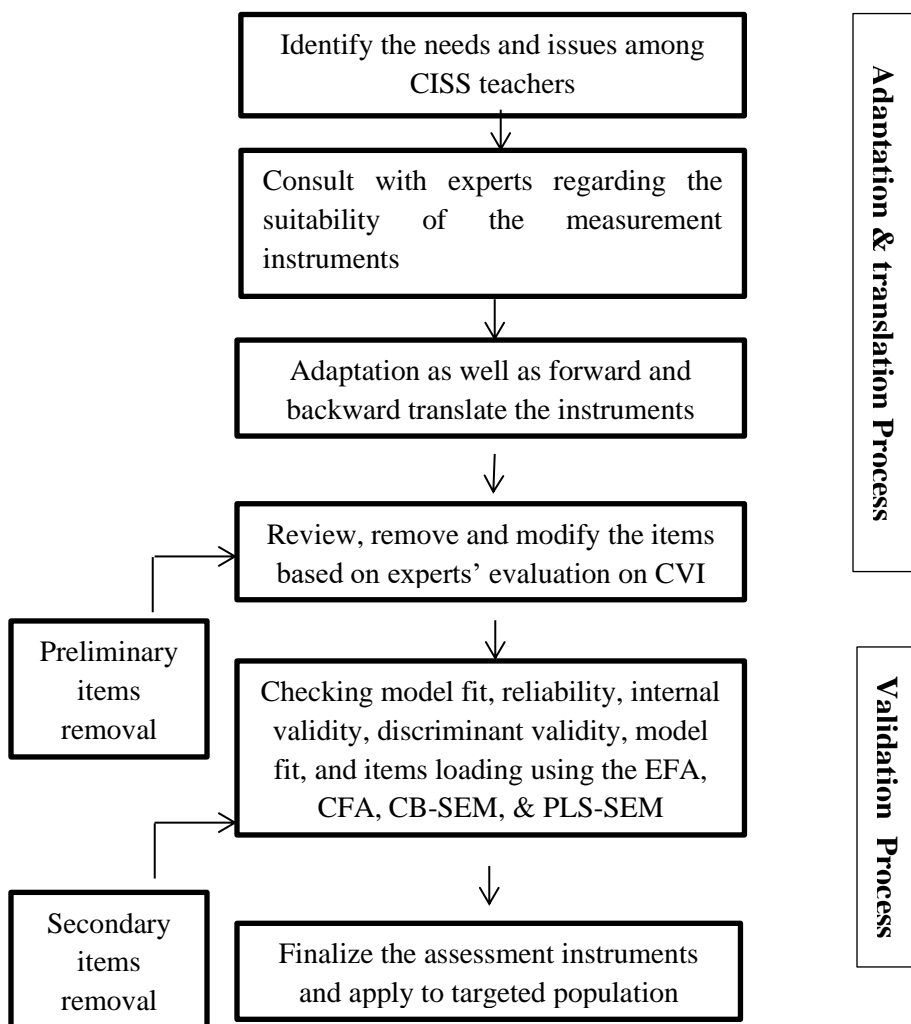
researchers utilize the STEU, SSREI, and Brief-cope inventory without worrying about cultural bias and language issues among Malaysian Chinese population.

However, current research has some limitations. The first is the fact that the research will be performed in the CISS settings only, with the potential problem of reduced generalizability of results to other Malaysian Chinese teachers. However, this research can be considered as a preliminary study representing the basis before applying it to larger population. The second limitation is little is known about the applicability of

adapted assessment instruments on different age groups. Thus, the researchers recommended to further investigation on the selected adapted assessment instruments on diverse age group. Not only on teachers, while the implication can also include the young adults. The researchers propose that the potential impact of the research lies in enabling CISS teachers to assess their EI skills and CR. This will help them to be more emotional awareness and understand their cope patterns when dealing with daily hassles.

### Adaptation, Forward & Backward Translation, & Validation Process

**Figure 2** The statistical procedures of the protocol study.



## Conclusions

Lack of emotional regulation and dysfunctional coping might reflect a serious threat for mental health among CISS teachers. Therefore, assessing CISS teachers' EI skills and CR in proper manner could help to reduce unforeseen negative impacts of COVID-19 on this population. The protocol will be performed with purposes of assessing and assisting CISS teachers understand their EI and CR so that further prevention programmes could be recommended for educators in future.

## Author Contributions

KST, FBK, WH, HSL, and CZG planned the protocol. KST wrote the manuscript and FBK, WH, HSL, and CZG provided ideas and performed the literature search. KST, FBK, WH, HSL, and CZG developed the steps of statistical analysis. FBK reviewed the manuscript.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors declared that there is no conflict of interest in the research.

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