The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Language Learning Strategies of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract: Following the introduction of new approaches in the area of intelligence - intelligence quotient, multiple intelligence, and recently the emergence of emotional intelligence - the emotional intelligence (henceforth EI) is taken into consideration as a crucial factor in the domains of learning and teaching, nowadays. The present study was intended to find the relationship between EI and using language learning strategies. To achieve this goal, initially 55 language learners at upper-intermediate level from four classes of boys and girls in an English language institute in Iran were randomly selected. Then, the Dominoes-70 test, aka D-70, was administered to homogenize the learners based on their IQ level. Next, through D-70, 48 homogenous students with the same level of intelligent quotient were assigned to this study. Subsequently, the Bar-On Emotional Quotient inventory (Bar-On EQ-i) and Oxford’s Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) were administered in order to obtain the participants’ total level of EI and also to identify different learning strategies that learners use in their learning process, respectively. To analyze the data, the Pearson correlational coefficient and independent t-test were used. Results suggest that: 1. There is not a meaningful difference between males and females in their use of language learning strategies. 2. There is a significant relationship between the students’ total level of EI and language learning strategies both in females and males. 3. There is not a significant difference regarding the subjects’ total level of EI and their genders.

Index Terms: Dominoes-70, Emotional Intelligence (EI), EFL learner, Language Learning Strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Second language learners have different rates in learning a second or foreign language. Some learners can learn second languages effortlessly but some others have no aptitude for learning foreign languages. For example, among immigrants who have lived in a country with the same condition for 20 years, some speak very eloquently, but some barely speak. In the question of what really the cause of the differences is, there is an important reason that can be attributed to learners’ different language aptitudes or different intellectual predispositions.

Brown (1994, p.93) declares that it was misinterpreted in the past that “the greatest barrier to second language learning seemed to boil down to a matter of memory”. In other words, the more capable learner in his or her retention of learned materials, the more successful he or she will be. It was inferred in this way because of defining and categorizing intelligence into subscales of linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities.

The concept of emotional intelligence was popularized in the 1990s. Before its popularization, however, Gardner (1983) proposed the existence of seven types of intelligence in the package of the multiple intelligence theory. In continue of suggesting various intelligence theories, Goleman (1995) introduced the concept of emotional intelligence which Gardner (1993) acknowledged that his suggested interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences are comparable to it. In the year 1998, Goleman in an article emphasized that EI is a more powerful predictive criterion than IQ to conjecture learners’ upcoming life success.

Moreover, regarding the intelligence both cognitive and emotional, there is another tool which learners use to learn
foreign languages more effectively, called language learning strategies. Researchers discovered that successful foreign language learners compared to their classmates who were not very successful used more mental strategic processes and learning strategies. Also, they frequently made use of them. It was obvious that the strategy had been applied before, during or after the task of a second language (Oxford, 1993). Brown (2001) emphasized that success in mastering a second language comes from an individual investment of time, effort and attention to the target language through a set of strategies for understanding and producing the target language.

Generally speaking, learning strategies are the means by which learners can learn the language but technically, different researchers have different definitions for it. Rubin (1975), for example, defined these strategies widely referred to as the techniques or tools that may be used to acquire knowledge. Faerch and Kasper (1980), by providing definition in psychological view of language, state that learning strategies are defined in relation to central problem and self-awareness. Hence, they defined learning strategies as “potentially conscious plans for solving what language learners’ problems are to achieve a specific learning goal. Moreover, the various and somehow overlapping definitions, different taxonomies were proposed by different researchers such as Oxford, O’Malley and Chamot, etc. which are similar to some extent. Most of these classifications of language learning strategies have affective, social, cognitive and metacognitive aspects in common.

Regarding the importance of learning throughout people’s lives and understanding that learning is a complex process as the result of interaction among so many factors like cognition, emotion, and strategies, this study aims at investigating the correlation between EI and language learning strategies. Therefore, the subsequent research questions were presented:
1. Is there any gender differences regarding the participants’ choice of language learning strategies?
2. Is there any significant relationship between EI level of participants and their choice of language learning strategies?
3. Is there any gender differences regarding the participants’ total level of EI?

2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Emotional Intelligence

In fact, the role of EI in educational situations has been recently highlighted. EI can be effective and at times more efficient than cognitive intelligence (IQ) in anticipating success in various life challenges (Goleman, 1995). Goleman states that IQ can categorize people before they start a career. It determines which field of professions they can hold. Although to find out which individuals raise to the top or which individuals fail, EI proves to be a stronger predictor of success (Goleman, 1998, 2001). The fundamental definition for EI is “the capacity to be aware of, control and express one’s emotions and to manage interpersonal relationships wisely and empathetically”. According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), EI is defined as being able to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this to guide one’s thinking and actions.

Salovey and Mayer (1993) stated that an emotionally intelligent person is skilled in four areas: identifying, using, understanding and regulating emotions. Similarly, Goleman (1998) in accordance with this opinion also emphasized that emotional intelligence consists of five components, namely knowing one’s emotions, managing emotions, motivating self, recognizing emotions in others and handling relationships. In continue, Bar-on (2000) defined EI as a collection of emotional and social knowledge and skills. According to him, EI is an array of non-cognitive skills which increase one’s success in life. His EI model includes five scales based on which quotient inventory was designed. These five scales are: Intrapersonal skills, Interpersonal skills, Adaptability, Stress management and General mood.

Each of the various models put forth by researchers has a different measurement tool, many of which have shown evidence of both validity and reliability. Interestingly, the methods of measurement fall into two distinct categories. There are performance-based measures which require individuals to implement their emotional skills in a manner similar to cognitive intelligence tests. The other measurement technique entails individuals filling out self-report questionnaires in order to rate their ability to utilize emotional skills. These two different methods of measurement have given rise to two different labels of EI: ability EI and trait EI. Ability EI is refer to the emotional abilities of an individual as assessed by performance measures. In contrast to this, trait EI (sometimes referred to as mixed-model EI (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000) is measured by self-report and looks at the capacity of an individual to recognize, generate and appropriately respond to emotions. Trait EI is a dispositional attribute which is stable across interpersonal situations while ability EI is a more stable cognitive skill.

2.2 Language Learning Strategy

From the 1970s onwards, numerous researchers have set out to conceptualize and categorize the learning strategies supposedly applied by learners at different levels. The reason of using learning strategies is that “it affects the emotional and motivational state of the learners or the means by which learners select, acquire or provide ordering new information” (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). Early researches were based on observations and interviews with successful learners. Subsequent researches developed more detailed taxonomies of learning strategies, the best known being those of Oxford (1990,
perhaps the most popular definition is proposed by green and oxford (as cited in najafi & toughiry, 2015) who state that “lls are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use, often intentionally, to improve their progress in developing l2 skills” (p. 265). oxford has defined learning strategies as: “the learners’ goal-directed actions for improving language proficiency or achievement, completing a task, or making learning more efficient, more effective, and easier” (2011b). her original taxonomy included six groups of strategies listed: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. also, there is another definition and known classification of strategies which is presented by o’malley and chamot. o’malley et al. (1985) divide language learning strategies into three main subcategories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, socio-affective strategies.

the use of learning strategies is affected by several factors. among them are the motivation, gender, cultural background, type of task, age and level of second language learning, learning style, academic major, level of language proficiency and national or ethical origin. for example, some asian students compared to other students with different cultural backgrounds use different learning strategies (oxford, 1993; reid, 1987).

2.3 empirical studies

there are many studies which examined the correlation between EI, second or foreign language learning, academic success, language learning strategies and second or foreign language proficiency. pishghadam (2007), for example, in a study in Iran examined the relationship between EI and second language success among 528 sophomore college students. in his study, EI was correlated with students’ GPA and their scores of different language skills- listening, writing, speaking and reading- at the end of the second year at university. the results revealed that second language skills and GPA strongly correlated with stress management and intrapersonal skills in the EI test. In continue, pishghadam (2009) conducted a research to investigate the relationship between EI and learning foreign languages. Results showed that there is a positive and meaningful relationship between foreign language learning and some dimensions of EI, but razmjo (2008) in his article reached the conclusion that there is no significant relationship between EI and learning foreign language. Moreover, there is no significant relationship between boys and girls regarding the skill levels and types of intelligence. Similarly, kaidan and azari (2009) investigated the relationship between EI and English language proficiency among 125 Iranian university EFL students at Islamic Azad university of Ahvaz branch. Results showed that there is a negative relationship between language proficiency and EI. Rokni, Hamidi, and Gorgani (2014) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and language achievement. Their findings showed that the two variables were significantly correlated with each other. the results of all of the above studies emphasized the importance of constructive and predictive power of EI in a second or foreign language success.

Also, the correlation between language learning strategies with other learning variables were investigated. aghasafari (2006) in a correlational study examined the correlation between EI and LLS among 100 college students at Islamic Azad University in Iran by using Bar-on EQ-i and a revisited version of SILL. The results revealed that there is a positive relationship between overall EI and language learning strategies. Ming Yuan (2009), for example, revealed that there is a positive significant correlation between language learning strategies and the level of language proficiency. Also, the more the learners use a variety of language learning strategies, the more proficient they will be. Similar to this study, Ying-Chan (2009), in an article with 418 participants, reached the conclusion that a high level of language proficiency has a significant influence on the use of language learning strategies. Learners with high skill levels used cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies more and also used less memorization strategy than other learning strategies.

3. methodology

3.1 participants

To test the hypotheses of the research formulated in a null form, 55 EFL students who were studying at a language institute in Iran were selected initially. They were randomly selected from among 4 classes of EFL learners at an upper-intermediate level, hence they were in the same level of language proficiency. In order to minimize the interference of other factors and to homogenize participants based on their level of IQ, the Dominoes-70, a test for measuring intelligence quotient, was administered. After the administration and calculating the mean and standard deviation, the participants who obtained scores one standard deviation above and below the mean were omitted. Finally, 48 homogeneous learners remained. The remaining EFL learners were native speakers of Persian and had taken English for approximately 4 years. They were 22 (48.5 per cent) males and 26 (54.2 per cent) females. The participants varied in age from 15 to 20 with an average of 16.92. Most of them were high school students and some were students at the university level.
3.2 Instruments
In this study, 3 questionnaires were used for the purpose of collecting the quantitative data.

3.2.1 The Persian Version of Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On EQ-i)

The EQ-i involves 133 items in the form of short sentences and employs a 5-point Likert-scale response ranging from “very seldom or not true of me” (1) to “very often true of me or true of me” (5). It takes approximately 40 minutes to complete. And some sentences in questionnaire have opposite scoring for measuring the total level of EI. EQ-i is a self-report measure of emotionally and socially intelligent behavior which assesses participants’ scores based on five composite scales such as Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Stress Management, Adaptability, and General Mood. Dehshiry (2003) in order to taken into consideration the cultural diversities and to guarantee the correct interpretation of the questionnaire’s items on behalf of participants devised the Persian version of the Bar-On EQ-i which was administered in this study. The validity of Bar-On emotional inventory calculated in the context of Iran by Cronbach alpha is 0.76 and also, the degree of reliability for this translated version is high (Cronbach alpha 0.92) (Dehshiry, 2003).

3.2.2 Oxford’s Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

The SILL questionnaire contains of 50 questions and is designed by Rebecca Oxford (1990).this questionnaire is divided into 6 subcategories in which questions 1 to 9, 10 to 23, 24 to 29, 30 to 38, 39 to 44 and 45 to 50 are related to and measured the memory, cognition, compensation and meta-cognitive, emotional and social learning strategies, respectively. Answers of this test are adjusted on a 5-degree scale in the Likert spectrum (totally agree to totally disagree). The means 1 to 1.4, 1.5 to 2.4, 2.5 to 3.4, 3.5 to 4.4, 4.5 to 5.5 show that the learner in his/her path of language learning never or almost never, rarely, sometimes, usually, always or almost always uses the language learning strategies, respectively. In terms of reliability and validity, the SILL questionnaire is studied via different techniques extensively (Oxford, 1996).

3.3 Procedure

The researchers decided to homogenize the participants to avoid the interference of IQ effects on the final results. Therefore, to achieve this goal D-70 was administered and the mean and standard deviation of the D-70 scores was calculated. Then, the participants who obtained scores one standard deviation above and below the mean were omitted from the research procedure. In the next phase, the researchers divided participants according to their gender into two groups. Later researchers tried to calculate the means of SILL and EI tests for each group (males and females) as well as the existing correlation of coefficient between two EI and SILL. In continue, for analyzing the data, Pearson correlational coefficient and the independent t-test were used to investigate the relationship between total level of participants’ EI and their language learning strategies and for comparing the performance of two groups on EI questionnaire, respectively.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of the analyses are presented in the tables below:

A descriptive statistics of quantitative data is given based on the research questions of the study in Table1.

| Table 1 Descriptive Statistics |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Language Learning Strategies | | | | | | |
| | Age | Memory | Cognitive | Compensation | Meta cognitive | Emotional | Social | LLS | IQ | EI |
| Number | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 |
| Mean | 16.92 | 26.95 | 42.77 | 17.85 | 29.06 | 17.68 | 18.06 | 152.40 | 29.77 | 289.02 |
| SD | 1.20 | 4.94 | 6.44 | 2.87 | 5.062 | 3.77 | 4.30 | 21.00 | 3.57 | 21.01 |
| Minimum | 15 | 10.00 | 28.00 | 13.00 | 19.00 | 10.00 | 10.00 | 107 | 25 | 251 |
| Maximum | 20 | 38.00 | 57.00 | 25.00 | 42.00 | 27.00 | 25.00 | 201 | 34 | 343 |

As displayed in Table 1, means of the language learning strategies, intelligence quotient, and emotional intelligence is
Also, in this research, subjects were divided into two groups of boys and girls. Results showed that there is no significant difference between these two groups in respect of their language learning strategies. Both groups used cognitive and metacognitive strategies more and emotional strategy less than other language learning strategies. All subjects used language learning strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, emotional, social in the same way. This is illustrated in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys’ Use of Language Learning Strategies</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>26.36</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28.00</td>
<td>57.00</td>
<td>43.50</td>
<td>6.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>17.68</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>29.09</td>
<td>4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>17.40</td>
<td>4.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>17.54</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As table 2 presents, boys used cognitive strategy (mean=43.50) and metacognitive strategy (mean=29.09) more than other strategies which followed by memory strategy, compensation strategy and social strategy while emotional strategy ranked the least frequency used with the mean of 17.40.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls’ Use of Language Learning Strategies</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>27.46</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td>53.00</td>
<td>42.15</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>42.00</td>
<td>29.03</td>
<td>5.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>17.92</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>18.50</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In can be seen that in table 3, cognitive and metacognitive strategies with the means of 42.15 and 29.03, respectively, are the most used and emotional strategy with the mean of 17.92 is the least applied strategies among girls.

For the second question, Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to determine the correlation between the total level of EI and using patterns of language learning strategies. In continue, the relationship between EI and different subcategories of language learning strategies is presented in Table 4.
Table 4

The Relationship between EI and Different Subcategories of Language Learning Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Memory</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Compensation</th>
<th>Metacognitive</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>-.312*</td>
<td>-.226*</td>
<td>-.129*</td>
<td>-.130*</td>
<td>-.100*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>.384</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>.497</td>
<td>.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that emotional intelligence is significantly correlated with different subcategories of language learning strategies. There is a negative correlation, i.e. (p < 0.01, r = 0.321); that is, it was found that the higher levels of EI indicated lesser levels of use of language learning strategies.

For the last question, mean and standard deviation of EI were separately measured for males and females. The male group in EI has a mean of 289.86 with a standard deviation of 17.20. The mean of the female group is 288.31 with a standard deviation of 24.10. Because these two groups were independent of each other, an independent t-test was used to see if the difference between the means of the two groups was statistically significant. Table 5 contains the results of the independent t-test.

Table 5

Independent t-test for Comparing the Performance of Male and Female on EI Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>1.292</td>
<td>.262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>.2644.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 5, the observed t-value was 0.25 at the confidence level of p < 0.05. It comes as no surprise to find that no significant correlation was found between the levels of EI and gender. This finding cohered with Nesari’s (2011) findings as he elucidated that gender did not affect the levels of EI.

Discussion

The present study was conducted with EFL learners in one of the language institutes in Iran to probe the relationship between the students’ emotional intelligence and their language learning strategies in two groups of boys and girls. Hence, English is just spoken and used in the classrooms and language learners do not have any chance to be exposed to English in their routine social communications. Results revealed that both groups of males and females have similar pattern in using language learning strategies. Both groups used cognitive and metacognitive strategies more and emotional (affective) strategy less than others. This result corresponds with the study carried out by Azari et al. (2010) who showed that the patterns of using language learning strategies are similar among boys and girls. Participants’ preferences in using language strategies reflects well their learning context. It depicts their limited exposure to English as the target language. Therefore, learners are inevitable to employ metacognitive strategies that contribute to their language learning. Moreover, findings of the present study depicted that there is a positively significant relationship between participants’ total level of EI and their language learning strategies in both groups. This is in accordance with Aghasafari (2006) and Zafari and Biria (2014) who...
found meaningful relationship between emotional intelligence and language learning strategies.

5. CONCLUSION

Lawson (2011) stated that “emotions acts as bridges between sensory input and thinking. When the input is positive, we are motivated to act and achieve a goal. When the input is negative, we do not act and nor do we learn. Negative emotions (Anxiety, depression and anger or frustration) are the examples of negative inputs which can interfere with learning and can cause problems in learning, create an abnormality which hinder learning and retards mental or emotional growth”. It is important to note that human beings were born with a fixed level of cognitive intelligence, IQ. Along with human’s growth, their cognitive skills grow to reach its fixed inborn level. Hence, it cannot develop anymore. Moreover, some factors can interfere with it in the way of reaching to its inherent degree and prevent the growth of it. But by introducing different and dynamic sorts of intelligence especially the emotional intelligence, teachers nowadays can develop their students’ learning capacities to learn more through improving their level of EI. Therefore, students can learn more, do better in their task of language learning and also compensate the shortages in their learning path created because of low level of IQ. To achieve the best level of language learning, a normally cognitively intelligent person should be emotionally and strategically intelligent, too. According to Nelsons and Low, “If students are to develop essential life skills and the ability to think constructively and act wisely, the emotional mind must be understood and considered central to education for the 21st century” (2006, p.1). Student EI aspects should be considered and not neglected. In other words, it is essential for language teachers not to forget the emotional aspects of the students and to consider emotional factors while teaching the students. Therefore, English language teachers should primarily be cognizant of the importance of the concept of emotional intelligence and make an attempt to enhance their abilities in this domain. For most of learners, initially, English classrooms look threatening. Hence, this is teachers’ duty to make a comfortable condition for students in order to promote language learners’ emotional skills. Since, EI skills assist learners to cope with stressful and conflict situations. According to Nelsons and Low (2005), “the more emotionally healthier learners, the more effectively they learn”. Eventually, English teachers are expected to utilize an educational curriculum to promote and reinforce their learners’ emotional intelligence so that they become aware of EI and its effects on learning in order to expand relevant skills in the language classes.

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