The Interaction of Emotional Intelligence and Self – Efficacy with EFL Learners` Age and Gender

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ABSTRACT: The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between EFL students` emotional intelligence (EI) and their sense of self efficacy beliefs. The researcher of the present study set out to investigate this association based on Bandure’s (1986, 1991) contention that self efficacy beliefs adjust performance through different processes. One of the important processes is the learner’s affective states. To investigate the relationship between EI and self - efficacy, 83 English learners were chosen through purposive sampling from an English institute in Iran. The participants were asked to answer the Bar - On EQ - I test as well as Self –Efficacy for Learning Form (SELF) Questionnaire. The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant relationship between EFL learners` EI and their self – efficacy beliefs, and this positive correlation is not affected by gender differences. Moreover, the results showed that there was no significant difference among female and male participants regarding the level of their EI and self - efficacy. Both high-stake and low-stakeholders can avail from the findings of this study.

Key words: EFL students, Emotional intelligence, Self efficacy

INTRODUCTION

It is generally believed that some people learn a second language easily and some with difficulty. There are many factors affecting second language learning success, among which the degree of intelligence that individuals possess has recently gained attention. Intelligence is a difficult word to define, since there is no agreement over its definition among scholars. Intelligence has undergone different definitions, first it was defined as a unidimensional concept (Binet, 1905), then as a multiple intelligence concept (Gardner, 1983) and finally as an emotional concept (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) . The findings of studies conducted on the EI demonstrated that there was a significant relationship between EFL learners` EI and their self – efficacy beliefs, and this positive correlation is not affected by gender differences. Moreover, the results showed that there was no significant difference among female and male participants regarding the level of their EI and self - efficacy.

Scholars contended that another important factor affecting second language success is the beliefs that individuals hold about their capabilities to complete a task successfully, i.e., the sense of self – efficacy ( Bandura, 1997). The facilitative role of self – efficacy beliefs has been proved in various educational situations (Pajares, 1996; Schunk & Meece, 2005).

The purpose of this study, as such, was to investigate the interaction of emotional intelligence and self – efficacy with EFL learners` gender in an educational context.

Review of the Related Literature

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a psychological construct which cannot be easily defined; however, Goleman (1998), defined emotional intelligence as simply “a different way of being smart” (p.84). Lynn (2002) contended that although individuals possess equal intellectual ability, training, or experience, the differences in people’s advancement lies in their emotional intelligence.

The literature available on emotional intelligence shows that there are a variety of definitions for what constructs emotional intelligence. Salovey and Mayer (1990) believed emotional intelligence is a kind
of social intelligence that comprises the capability to check one's own and others' emotions and to use the information to guide thinking and deeds.

There are some other definitions and models for emotional intelligence conceptualizing it as a mixed set of perceived capabilities, skills, and personality behaviors. In Goleman’s (1998) view, emotional intelligence is “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (p. 317). Although there is no consensus over a unified definition or model for emotional intelligence, there is a general agreement that emotional skills are related with success in many areas of life. It is widely known that to create opportunities and situations for effective learning in educational contexts, students need both content area knowledge and abilities associated with social and emotional competencies. Empirical studies revealed that there is a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement and other cognitive, affective, and metacognitive factors contributing to learning. For instance, Gil – Olarte, Palomera, and Brackett’s (2006) research demonstrated that students' emotional intelligence is positively correlated with academic success and social competence. In a similar vein, Bracket and Katluka (2007) asserted that their emotional literacy program designed to develop emotion-related skills in students will also enhance abstract reasoning and reflective learning. Furthermore, Mortiboys (2005) indicated that creating emotionally enhancing learning environments will promote the likelihood of learners' satisfaction, motivation, and cooperation. The major implication emerged from these studies has been the need to incorporate emotional literacy into the educational curriculum. These programs are expected to help students modify their emotions appropriately, manipulate undesirable emotional states to more productive ones, and understand the association between emotions, thoughts, and actions.

**Self - Efficacy**

If people have high positive self-efficacy about learning a second language, then they believe that they have the power and abilities to reach this goal. On the other hand, people with low self-efficacy feel that they do not have the power and abilities to learn a language, thus admitting failure from the start (Barnhardt, 1997). Nearly two decades of research has revealed that academic achievement, to a large extent, can be determined by degree of self-beliefs, thus educational psychologists focused on students’ self-beliefs in terms of their academic pursuits (Pajares, 2000).

The concept of self-efficacy is recognized by Oxford and Shearin (1995) as “a broadened view of expectancy which is drawn from social cognition theory” (p. 21). They define the term as one’s judgment of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations. According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy refers to “peoples’ judgments of their capability to organize and execute courses of actions required to attain designated types of performance” (p. 391). For him, self-efficacy can be a better predictor of behavior than any other closely related variables. This view is supported by Graham and Weiner (1995, cited in Pajares, 2000) who observed that the acquisition of new skills and the performance of previously learned skills have been related to efficacy beliefs at a level not found in any of the other expectancy constructs.

According to Pajares (2000), individuals’ success and failure in school can be predicted through beliefs they create and develop. This would lead one to infer that research on achievement, on why students achieve or fail to achieve, and on why they do things they do in school should naturally focus, at least in great part, on students’ self-efficacy beliefs.

The contributing role of students' self-efficacy beliefs in academic tasks and purposes and its association with their academic performance on different academic behaviors have been supported by a substantial body of literature. Mathematics, specific self-efficacy (Lent et al., 1987), computer training (Gist, Schwoerer, & Rosen, 1989), test performance (Yeperen, 2006), essay writing (Pajares & Johnson, 1996), and language learning (Wong, 2005) are among these academic performance. The findings of nearly all these studies are in line with Bandura's (1986) argument. He argued students with a higher degree of self-efficacy tend to display more effort, keep trying in difficult situations, choose course of activities more attentively, and try keeping more realistic and flexible attributions. While students low in self-efficacy exert less persistence and effort expenditure, lack intentionality, avoid uncertain and challenging tasks and possess nonrealistic and maladaptive attributions.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Emotional intelligence and self-efficacy as two main affective factors contributing to second language learning have gained attention in research relevant to learning success and achievement in EFL
situations. (Aghasafari, 2006; Fahim & Pishghadam, 2007; Ghanizade & Moafian, 2010). Emotional skills have recently received considerable research interest in the field of education and psychology. Chamot (1993), identifying some of the major academic needs of the students who want to learn English, reports that one of the basic needs of language learners is having high self-efficacy, i.e., a high level of confidence in successfully completing a task. Students confident in their academic skills expect high marks on related exams and papers. Conversely, students who doubt their academic ability see a low grade on their paper even before they begin the exam.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is characterized as a kind of ability to recognize, use, comprehend, and control one’s emotions to be able to reduce stress, interact efficiently, empathize with others, and cope with difficulties. Many different parts of individuals’ daily activities such as their behaviors towards others and their communication with others are strongly affected by this construct. Theoretical views in the literature indicate that self-efficacy is influenced by several factors, one of which is the individual’s emotional states (Bandura, 1986). Thus, it is plausible to conclude that there may be a relationship between EI and self-efficacy beliefs.

Research Questions
This study aims to find answers to the following research questions:
1. Is there any significant relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy?
2. Does EFL learners’ gender play any role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy?

Research Null Hypotheses
Based on the preceding research questions, the following null hypotheses are presented:
1. There is not any significant relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy.
2. EFL learners’ gender does not play any role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy.

METHOD

Participants
The researcher conducted this study with 83 Iranian EFL students including 44 females and 39 males. Their age varied from 16 to 18, and 22 to 24.

Instruments
EQ-I Test
Bar-On EI test, called the emotional quotient inventory (EQ-I), was employed by the researcher to evaluate students’ emotional intelligence. It is a self-report test designed by Bar-On 1980, measuring emotional and social intelligent behavior (Bar-On 1997). The test comprised 133 items in the form of short statements which measures five broad areas of competencies and 15 factorial components (discussed in Bar-On’s model). In the present study, a Persian version of EQ-I test was used to delete cultural differences and avoid any misunderstanding regarding the content of the questionnaire on the part of the students. According to Dehshiri (2003), the Persian version adapted in Iran and its Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was found to be .76 and the inventory’s hypothesized structure was supported by the results of the factor analysis.

Self–Efficacy for Learning Form Questionnaire (SELF) Questionnaire
A questionnaire which addressed students’ English self-efficacy was developed (see Appendix B) by the researcher based on General Self-Efficacy (GSE) by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1979) and Self–Efficacy for Learning Form (SELF) by Zimmerman, Kitsantas, and Campillo (2005). In a view of the research purpose, the researcher translated (from English into Persian) and mixed the two questionnaires to modify the one which fits the English self-efficacy level of the students. The final questionnaire includes 40 items in the form of short statements based on a five-point response scale. The scales were anchored at one end by ‘true of me’ (5) and at the other end by ‘not true of me’ (1). In this way, a high score indicated strong endorsement of the items. Some of the items which were negatively worded were reversed prior to the calculations of the scale score. In this study, the total reliability of the translated version was estimated through Cronbach’s alpha formula. The questionnaire was found to be reliable.
RESULTS

As table 4.1 shows, the mean and the standard deviation were calculated for both female (N = 44) and male (N = 39) learners regarding their self-efficacy and emotional intelligence; female learners’ self-efficacy (M = 147.5455, SD = 18.28006), female learners’ emotional intelligence (M = 156.0227, SD = 13.94255), male learners’ self-efficacy (M = 147.5897, SD = 17.47286), and male learners’ emotional intelligence (M = 158.4615, SD = 12.28788). The total results for self-efficacy (M = 147.5663, SD = 17.79640), and for emotional intelligence (M = 157.1687, SD = 13.16853).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Self-Efficacy</th>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>147.5455</td>
<td>156.0227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std.Deviation</td>
<td>18.28006</td>
<td>13.94255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>147.5897</td>
<td>158.4615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std.Deviation</td>
<td>17.47286</td>
<td>12.28788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>147.5663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std.Deviation</td>
<td>17.79640</td>
<td>13.16853</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As table 4.2 displays, the mean and the standard deviation were calculated for both age groups regarding their self-efficacy and emotional intelligence; the younger learners’ self-efficacy (M = 147.1961, SD = 19.62449), the younger learners’ emotional intelligence (M = 156.0196, SD = 12.67516), the older learners’ self-efficacy (M = 148.1563, SD = 14.69718), and the older learners’ emotional intelligence (M = 159.000, SD = 13.92607).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Self-Efficacy</th>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>147.1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std.Deviation</td>
<td>19.62449</td>
<td>12.67516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>148.1563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std.Deviation</td>
<td>14.69718</td>
<td>13.92607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>147.5663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std.Deviation</td>
<td>17.79640</td>
<td>13.16853</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question One

The first research question was: Is there any significant relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy? Pearson product moment correlation was applied to the data to determine the relationship between EFL learners’ emotional intelligence and their level of self-efficacy.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation for determining the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>P &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self - efficacy</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>P &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

The results of the correlation indicated that there were significant relationship between EFL learners’ emotional intelligence and their level of self-efficacy (r = .42, p < .01). So the first null hypothesis was strongly rejected.

Research Question Two

The second research question was: Does EFL learners’ gender play any role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy? Pearson product moment correlation was applied to investigate the effect of gender on the interaction of these two constructs.
Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation for determining the role of gender on the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>P &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>P &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

As the table displays, for female students (r = .38, p < .01), and for male students (r = .46, p < .01). The results revealed that EI and self-efficacy are positively correlated and gender differences do not make any change in their correlation.

The results indicated that EFL learners’ gender plays no significant role on the relationship between learners’ emotional intelligence and their self-efficacy. Therefore, the second null hypothesis was accepted.

DISCUSSIONS

The researcher’s first question examined the relationship between EFL learners’ emotional intelligence and their sense of self-efficacy. The results of the study demonstrate that two constructs are positively associated. In other words, a high magnitude of EFL learners’ emotional intelligence will lead to the enhancement of their beliefs in their abilities to learn English successfully. This is in line with some theoretical views in self-efficacy literature suggesting that self-efficacy is affected by individuals’ affective and emotional states. The findings of the present study are also in accordance with previous empirical studies. For example, as Chan (2007) indicated individuals possessed high emotional intelligence will exhibit a high degree of self-efficacy, accordingly. The present results are also consistent with the findings of Hashemi’s (2011) study, in that he reported a positive significant relationship between these two constructs.

The results of the researcher’s second question reveal that gender is of no great importance in the interaction of EFL learners’ emotional intelligence and their level of self-efficacy. In other words, the strong positive relationship between these two constructs among male and female learners does not change with the gender differences. Hashemi’s (2011) study demonstrated that gender differences do not play any role in the relationship between EI and self-efficacy.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research grew out of the researcher’s desire to know the interaction of emotional intelligence and English self-efficacy with EFL learners’ age and gender. The major conclusion derived from the present study demonstrate that emotional intelligence and self-efficacy are positively correlated. This means that the enhancement of learners’ EI will increase the level of self-efficacy and vice versa. The facilitative role of self-efficacy in different academic success, motivation, and attitudes was supported by a plethora of studies (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2002; Wong, 2005; Ghanizade & Moafian, 2011a). Another conclusion is that the interaction of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy is not affected by factors such as learners’ age and gender. In addition, the researcher concluded that the degree of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy do not differ with learners’ age and gender differences.

The strong correlation between EFL learners’ emotional intelligence and their self-efficacy provided evidence to support Pajares’ (2000) argument that inner processes of students and the beliefs they create and hold about their capabilities must be given due attention, since they come to grip with what is clearly one of the major tasks in human life cycle—success or failure in school. He also suggested that ordinary practices of schooling must be reexamined with a view to the contributions they make to students’ sense of self-efficacy:

We can aid our students by helping them develop the habit of excellence in schooling, while at the same time nurturing the self-beliefs necessary to maintain that excellence throughout their adult lives. This will require not only frequent intellectual challenge and stimulation, but also frequent emotional support and encouragement (p. 35).

Regarding the implications, it is expected that English teachers be familiar with the positive association between EFL learners’ emotional intelligence and their self-efficacy beliefs. Therefore, the role of teachers is central, i.e., in exploring learners’ beliefs about their ability as language learners and supporting those who need to develop their sense of self-efficacy. They, as Cotterall (1999) asserts, need
to allocate class time and attention to raising awareness of monitoring and evaluating learners’ beliefs about their ability. This would allow teachers to either reinforce or challenge certain beliefs. According to Cotterall (1999), providing teachers with a means of identifying and supporting individual learners who need to develop their sense of self-efficacy beliefs, before they engage in learning tasks, may lead to a crucial intervention in the language learning experiences of such learners.

But the question that may arise here is about how teachers may alter the learners’ sense of self-efficacy. In this regard, Pajares (2000) claims that low self-efficacy rooted in ‘mastery experience’ requires teachers to help their pupils believe that success in an endeavor is the result of self-disciplined effort. In other words, he views teachers as important persuaders who cultivate peoples’ beliefs in their capabilities, while at the same time ensuring that the envisioned success is attainable by exerting more effort.

REFERENCES


