THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AMONG IRANIAN EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract
The primary objective of this study was to explore the effects of emotional intelligence and use of language learning strategies on English proficiency among Iranian EFL university students. The participants were 135 undergraduate students in Hormozgan province in Iran majoring in English Teaching and English Translation from Islamic Azad University. This study employed correlation and regression methods for data analysis. A series of instruments were used to obtain the related data including Nelson Proficiency Test, Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The results revealed that there was a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and English proficiency but a positive relationship was found between English proficiency and use of language learning strategies. Metacognitive and affective strategies tended to affect English proficiency more. Social strategies were the least effective.

Key Words: Emotional Intelligence; Language Learning Strategies; English Proficiency

INTRODUCTION

Since late 1970s, there has been a bulk of research indicating that the focus of present educational systems is on rational and cognitive aspects such as memory and problem solving and that emotional mind has received little attention and its important contributions have been neglected (Epstein, 1998; and Nelson and Low, 2003). Students who receive higher intelligence quotient (IQ) scores are usually considered more intelligent. Recently, however, several researchers like Thorndike, Goleman, Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, Stern, Bar-On, to mention a few, have focused on a different dimension of intelligence called emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional intelligence refers to the capacities to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and in others. EI can be as much powerful, and at times, more powerful than IQ in predicting success in various life challenges (Goleman, 1995). "In distinguishing successful people within a job category or profession, EI emerges as a stronger predictor than IQ of who, for instance, will become a star, salesperson, team head, or a top-rank leader," (Goleman, 1995, p. 34). Goleman states IQ can sort people before they start a career; it determines which fields or professions they can hold. To learn which individuals rise to the top or which individuals fail, however, IQ ‘short circuit’ and EI proves to be stronger predictor of success (Goleman, 1998, 2001).

Emotional intelligence is a set of acquired skills and competencies that predict positive outcomes at home with one’s family, in school, and at work. People who possess these are healthier, less depressed, more productive at work, and have better relationships, Goleman (1995) contends. He defines emotional intelligence in terms of the ability to love and be loved by friends, partner and family members. Emotional intelligence is increasingly relevant to the organizational development of people, because the principles of emotional intelligence provide a new way to understand and assess people’s behaviors, management styles, attitudes, interpersonal skills, and potentials. Serrat (2009) sees the emotional intelligence as an important factor in human resources in terms of “planning, job profiling, recruitment interviewing and selection, management development, customer relations
and customer service, and even more” (p. 50). He concludes that emotional intelligence represents an ability to validly reason with emotions and to use emotions to improve thinking. EQ/EI, as a relatively recent behavioral model, enables us to perceive, use, understand, and manage our emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Although different competing and sometimes conflicting components have been integrated into emotional intelligence, this construct has offered the potential to integrate the reasoning of a person's cognition and emotion.

Recently more attention has been paid to the effect of emotional intelligence on academic success in education (Elias, Arnold, & Hussey 2003). Nevertheless, as Brackett and Katulak (2007) state, only few studies have been conducted to explore this concept in contexts where English is spoken as a second or foreign Language (ESL/EFL), given the idea that the emotional intelligence serves both internal mechanisms and external environment in the process of language learning (Goleman 2001). Earlier, Goleman (1995) held that roughly 80 percent of the variance among people in various forms of success that is unaccounted for by IQ tests and similar tests can be explained by other characteristics that constitute emotional intelligence. He has defined emotional intelligence as including “abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustration, to control impulses and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to emphasize and to hope” (p. 34). Later, he reformulated his first definition of emotional intelligence and broke down emotional intelligence into twenty-five different emotional competencies, among them political awareness, service orientation, self-confidence, consciousness, and achievement drive (Goleman, 1998).

What is Emotional Intelligence?
The early Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory, sometimes referred to as emotional quotient, was originally developed during the 1970’s and 80’s by the work and writings of psychologists Howard Gardner, Peter Salovey, and John Mayer (Lall, 2009). Later this notion formally became the center of interest with growing emphasis on research over the interaction of emotion and thought in the field of psychology in 1990’s (Grewal & Salovey, 2005). The history of EI originated from the concept of social intelligence. Thorndike in 1920’s viewed EI through the lens of social intelligence and mentioned that social intelligence is the ability to empathize with others and act wisely in human relationships (cited in Goleman,1998), but his views were not taken seriously until years later. In 1948, emotional thought was considered to be in the realm of intelligence.

No serious attempt was taken in this field until the mid years of the 1980’s, when Thorndike’s view was born again in the works of Howard Gardner (Goleman, 1998). Gardner (1983) introduced eight different types of intelligence, one of which, the personal intelligence, made way for the extensive development of EI. Finally, in 1990, Mayer and Salovey, based on Gardner’s view and emphasis on individual differences, introduced their complete model of EI and defined it thoroughly (Bar-On, 1997). In fact, EI is largely accepted as the ability to understand and apply the knowledge created from our emotions to aid effective functioning, reduce the impact of stress, and enhance relationships.

Emotional Quotient as a Measure of EI
According to Bar-On (2004), emotional intelligence is "an array of noncognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in the coping with environmental demands and pressures” (p. 111). For the first time, Bar-On (1988) coined the term emotional quotient (EQ) as a counterpart to IQ, that is, to cognitive ability. Bar-On thought of EQ as representing a set of social and emotional abilities that help individuals cope with the demands of daily life. As he believes, EI addresses the emotional, personal, social, and survival dimensions of intelligence. EI and emotional skills develop over time, change throughout life, relate to one's potential for performance, are process-oriented, and can be improved through training (Bar-On 2004).

Bar-On (1997) suggested that since EI is an important element in one’s life showing and predicting success, there is a dire need to measure, operationalize, and quantify this construct. In fact, finding a way to measure and enhance EI seemed to be inevitable. In the year 1997, Bar-On, using his psychological experiences, made his EQ questionnaire which is an appropriate test to measure EI. In his definition, EI is a collection of capabilities, competencies, and non-cognitive skills that have an effect on a person’s abilities to gain success in the face of environmental pressures. In other words, he believed that EI is the ability to understand emotions and how such emotions influence interpersonal relationships (Bar-On, 2000).
Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EQ as a scientifically testable intelligence. Their definition of EQ has led to the idea that EI is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. In other words, as this definition entails there seem to be four functions in EQ:

- Perceive or sense emotions
- Use emotions to assist thought
- Understand emotions
- Manage emotions

According to Hein (2003), the concept of EQ connotes that IQ, or conventional intelligence, is too narrow and that there are wider areas of emotional intelligence that determine how successful we are. He maintains that success requires more than IQ, which has tended to be the traditional measure of intelligence, ignoring essential behavioral and character elements; in fact “we have all met people who are academically brilliant and yet are socially and inter-personally inept; and we know that despite possessing a high IQ rating, success does not automatically follow” (p. 154).

In recent years, a number of competency models for EI have been developed (Salovey & Mayer 1998); the most well known is the model developed by Goleman (1995). In this model, Goleman describes individual competencies and motivation as a general factor that applies to all four emotional intelligence styles as following:

- Self-awareness (Reflective Style)
- Social skills (Conceptual Style)
- Self-regulation (Organized Style)
- Empathy (Empathetic Style)

**Emotional Intelligence in ELT**

A number of studies (Boyatzis, 2006; Carmeli, 2003) have reported a positive relationship between different affective traits, in particular, EI, and job attitudes such as affective commitment. Affective commitment, one of the core constructs of carrier and organizational commitment, is defined as “positive feelings of identification with, attachment to and involvement in the work of the organization” (Mayer & Allen, 1984, p. 292). As Carmeli (2003) noted, emotionally intelligent individuals are expected to recognize, manage, and use their emotions to manipulate the ensuing obstacles and prevent their negative effects on attitudes towards their profession (cited in Salami, 2007). This is particularly true when it comes to professions such as teaching, with its high levels of complexity and constant interaction.

Study of EI in the educational setting is a relatively new endeavor and, as such, few studies have focused on the overall effects of EI on second or foreign language learning. These few studies have been limited to certain dimensions as management, self-esteem, anxiety, strategy use, or motivation only. In ESL/EFL context, different studies examined the relationship between EQ and second language success (Chao, 2003; Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1994; Nelson & Low, 1999). For instance, Aghasafari (2006) found a positive relationship between overall EQ and language learning strategies. Furthermore, Riemer (2003) argues that EQ skills contribute to the learning potential of foreign language acquisition, particularly as it relates to acknowledging the legitimacy of other cultures as being equally valid.

**Language Learning Strategies**

In the area of teaching and learning a second/foreign language, there has been an increasing interest in changing the focus from the teacher-centered classroom to the learner-centered classroom by shifting the focus from the product-orientatedness to the process-orientatedness of language learning. In this view, the learners are considered as active participants that the effects of teaching will be partly dependant on what they know such as their prior knowledge, what they think about during learning, and their active cognitive processes (Dansereau, 1985; Weinstein & Underwood, 1985). Also, this has brought attention to learning strategies which an individual learner applies during the learning process to facilitate second language learning (Oxford, 1990;
Wenden, 1991). That is, how learners’ process new information and the kinds of strategies they use to learn, understand, or remember has been the major concern of the second or foreign language researchers.

Language learning strategies (LLS) have been defined as operations employed by the learner to assist in the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and the use of information (Dansereau, 1985; Rigney, 1978) or as steps taken by learners to enhance their own learning (Oxford, 1990). A summary of the various definitions of learning strategies given by some researchers are provided in the following.

Learning strategies are important and should be paid attention to because they are one of the major applications of cognitive theory. Oxford (1990) claims that “learning strategies are behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable”. Learning strategies are procedures undertaken by the learner, in order to make their own language learning as effective as possible. In O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990, p. 52) view, learning strategies are complex procedures that individuals apply to tasks; consequently, they may be represented as procedural knowledge which may be acquired.

Some ESL researchers (e.g., O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzares, Kupper, & Russo, 1985; Oxford, 1990; Stern, 1992) have classified learning strategies into different categories. For instance, O’Malley et al. (1985, pp. 582-584) divided LLS into three major subcategories, i.e., socio-affective, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. LLS are also classified by Stern (1992, pp. 262-266) into five main categories that are: a) interpersonal strategies, b) communicative-experiential strategies c) cognitive strategies, d) affective strategies, and e) management and planning strategies. Oxford (1990) has also classified LLS into two major classes i.e., direct and indirect strategies which are further divided into six strategy groups: cognitive, meta-cognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective, and social strategies that are considered as the most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date (Ellis, 1994, p. 539).

Currently, the growing interest toward language learning, particularly English, has made the factors that could affect the learning effectiveness more important. As we all know, many factors influence the second/foreign language learning process. However, one of the most important elements for SLA research to explain is the specific strengths and weaknesses that individuals carry out with them in their second/foreign languages respectively. Thus, knowing more about the influence of emotional intelligences on ESL/EFL learners is getting more important.

As the present study is intended to focus on the use of learning strategies and emotional intelligences in Iranian context, this section provides a review of the pertinent literature in Iran. Investigating whether or not there is any relationship between the use of LLS, foreign language proficiency and EQ scores of Iranian EFL learners, Akbari and Talebinezhad (2003) conducted a study in which they collected data from 128 (45 males, 83 females) English B.A. and M.A. students majoring in English translation and TEFL. The researchers reported that there is a positive relationship between the use of LLS and students’ proficiency scores. Compensatory strategies were also found as the best predictor of language proficiency. No significant relationship was found between the participants’ strategy use and their EQ scores. Additionally, they reported that Iranian mostly use metacognitive strategy while affective strategy was used the least.

A study carried out by Razmjoo, Sahragard, and Sadri (2009) was aimed at identifying the relationship between EI, vocabulary learning knowledge and vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian EFL learners. The subjects of the study were 100 senior students who were English language teacher trainees at Shiraz Azad University between 2006 and 2007. Data analysis of the findings (descriptive and inferential) revealed that there is a relationship between EI and vocabulary learning knowledge. It was also found that among different domains of intelligence, verbal-linguistic and naturalist intelligences made statistically significant contribution to the prediction of vocabulary learning knowledge.

To determine the relationship between EI and language proficiency, Razmjoo (2008) did a study in which the researcher aimed to investigate the relationship between EI and language proficiency of Iranian EFL PhD candidates, to explore whether one of the emotional intelligence type is predictor of language proficiency, and to examine the effect of gender on language proficiency and types of intelligences. The subjects of the study...
were 278 (179 males, 99 females) PhD candidates at Shiraz University. An EI questionnaire and a 100-item language proficiency test were distributed among the candidates. The data revealed that there was no significant relationship between language proficiency and the combination of intelligences in general and the types of intelligence in particular. Likewise, no significant difference was found between male and female students and between their EI and language proficiency.

Pish Ghadam and Moafian (2008) looked into the role of Iranian EFL teachers’ EI in their success in language teaching at high school level. They selected a population of 93 English language teachers from different high schools in Mashhad, a city in the north-east of Iran. At the end of the schooling year, the teachers were asked to fill out the Persian version of MIDAS. Simultaneously, another questionnaire, entitled the Students’ View of an Ideal Teacher (in Pish Ghadam & Moafian, 2008) was distributed among the students (N=2287) of the above-mentioned teachers. In using the questionnaire, the researchers aimed at evaluating the performance of teachers regarding their teaching skills, personality, supplementary programs, activities, and social-educational life by their students. No significant relationship was found between their success and other types of intelligences. Furthermore, it was found that there was no significant difference between gender and EI regarding the teaching success.

As noted earlier, the aim of this study was to investigate the effects of EI profiles of the Iranian EFL university students and their use of LLS on their English proficiency score. More specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the most and least frequently-used language learning strategies by Iranian EFL undergraduate students?

2. Is there any relationship between language learning strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and their English proficiency score?

3. Is there any relationship between Emotional Intelligence profile of Iranian EFL learners and their English proficiency score?

METHOD

A total of one hundred and thirty five Iranian EFL undergraduate students (42 males, 93 females), studying in Islamic Azad University branches in Hormozgan province, were randomly selected as the sample of this study. The participants were majoring in English Language Teaching and English Language Translation.

The needed data was collected using three instruments. The first instrument employed in this study was, the ‘Bar-On EI test, also called as the emotional quotient inventory (EQ-I). Designed by Bar-On in 1980, the Bar-On EI test is a self report measure of emotionally and socially intelligent behavior that provides an estimate of emotional-social intelligence (Bar-On, 1997). It includes 133 items in the form of short sentences which measure five broad areas of skills and 15 factorial components (already explained in Bar-On’s Model). The questionnaire takes nearly 40 minutes to complete and employs a five-point response scale with a textual response format ranging from ‘very seldom’ or ‘not true of me’ to ‘very often’ or ‘true of me’. Each item has the value of five ranging to one. In this study, to avoid cross-cultural differences and probable misunderstanding regarding the content of the questionnaire, the translated Persian version of this questionnaire was employed. This adapted final form was reduced into 90 items and the Cronbach’s Alpha reliability index was reported as .80 (Samouei, 2002). In another study, Dehshiri (2003) reported that the Persian version has generally good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity. As he states, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was found to be .76 and the results of the factor analysis provided convincing support for the inventory hypothesized structure. Bar-On questionnaire is based on the most comprehensive theory of EI to date and renders an overall EQ score as well as scores for the 15 major categories. These important areas of emotional intelligence are measured accurately with a sophisticated correction factor. Students’ scores have to range from minimum 270 to maximum 450. SILL was also distributed among the students in order to determine their strategy use. The Inventory that includes 50 Likert-type items was developed by Oxford (1990) and covers six subscales of LLS that are memory, cognitive, compensation,
meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies. In this study, the researchers used the Persian version of SILL which was normed by Tahmasebi (1999) for Iranian learners with cronbach alpha of 0.77. Nelson Proficiency test was also utilized to determine the level of language proficiency of the participants of the present study. Descriptive statistics including minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation as well as correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were used for data analysis of the gathered data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the obtained data revealed a series of descriptive statistics regarding the proficiency score, Emotional Intelligence profile and language learning strategy use of the participants of the present study. The related descriptive statistics is presented in Tables 1 to 3.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of participants’ EQ profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQ</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>312.43</td>
<td>376.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of participants English proficiency score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Proficiency</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26.31</td>
<td>35.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first research question of the present study was to investigate the LLS used by Iranian EFL students. As shown in Table 3, the descriptive statistics of the results indicates that Iranian EFL learners are more willing to use meta-cognitive strategies, followed by affective strategies. Social strategies are shown to be used least frequently by Iranian undergraduate students.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of participants’ use of LLSs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SILL Categories</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next research question in this study attempts to find out the relationship between LLS and English proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. In an attempt to answer this research question, a Pearson correlation was conducted between the proficiency score and learning strategies scores to find out the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the two variables. The correlation between the proficiency and SILL was calculated, using SPSS version 17. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation between EQ and Proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>-0.16*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the finding in Table 4, it was revealed that the correlation between the EI and proficiency is $r = -0.16$. The correlation coefficient shows a significant negative relationship between the variables of EI and...
proficiency. Based on Guilford’s rule of the thumb, the relationship of EI and proficiency in the present study is low.

To see the relationship between language learning strategy use and proficiency, the correlation between these two variables was calculated. The result is tabulated in Table 5.

Table 5: Correlation between LLS and Proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LLS</th>
<th>0.24**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

As shown in Table 5, the results of Pearson coefficient determination analysis are indicative of a low, positive correlation ($r = 0.24$) between proficiency and use of language learning strategies.

Regression analysis revealed that metacognitive, affective, and social strategies as well as EI contributed to English proficiency score. The highest contribution belonged to metacognitive strategies followed by social strategies and affective strategies. EI showed the least contribution. Table 6 shows the regression analysis.

Table 6: Regression analysis for the factors contributing to English proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta (β)</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig. T</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Contribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>2.896</td>
<td>0.454</td>
<td>5.064</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>1.430</td>
<td>0.260</td>
<td>3.014</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>1.532</td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td>3.499</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.355</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>1.948</td>
<td>0.237</td>
<td>2.989</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.410</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>33.514</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the relationship between EI profiles, LLS and English language proficiency of Iranian EFL undergraduate university students. The findings revealed that there is a low, negative correlation between EI and English proficiency score, $r = -0.16$. A low, positive correlation between language learning strategies and proficiency score was another finding of the present study ($r = 0.24$). As for the frequency of use of learning strategies, the study shed light on the fact that Iranian students have a stronger tendency to use meta-cognitive strategies, followed by affective strategies while social strategies were the least used.

The findings of the present study may serve as recommendations to educators to modify instruction and offer a variety of opportunities for learners in the classroom. They might help educators select a variety of appropriate teaching materials to meet the needs of learners with different abilities. Therefore, prior to choosing any teaching materials, educators should conduct a needs analysis and a test in order to find out the EI profile of the students and to avoid having any mismatch between selected topics and the students’ needs.

Finally, the teachers who have the greatest impact on the learning of the students in Iran may find the findings of the present study fruitful in their EFL classes and/or in designing their own syllabuses. Actually, the findings of this study can help teachers improve their literacy instruction, as they require feedback on their job in order to adjust their instruction to better meet the needs of the students. Thus, one of the implications of the new understanding is that once a teacher has a picture of the students’ strengths and weaknesses in different intelligence areas, s/he can help them realize and develop their intellectual capabilities accordingly. Therefore, the findings can provide teachers with further insights into factors involved in determining an EI profile of the Iranian EFL university students. As far as the EI and learning strategies are concerned, both teachers and learners can use the findings of this study as a guide to improve their EFL classes. Having access to EI profiles
and learning strategies of learners will help the teachers in planning activities to connect both strategies and students' talents and provide students with the best possible instruction.

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