

The Relationship between EI and Writing Improvement of Iranian EFL Students at MA Level

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Writing skill in MA students. To fulfill the purpose of the study, 50 post graduate EFL students took part in this study. The investigation was done through using an EI questionnaire and two tests of writing, one before and another after the instruction. To analyze the data, paired sample t-test and Two-Way ANOVA were used. To check the correlation, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was run. The findings, furthermore, showed that the connection is straight. That is, with teaching learners how to write, argue and defend points, students become motivated to use information include in emotion to make efficient decisions. By the same token, believing that they are capable to manage emotions and handle relationship, learners show more persistence in their

writing. Based on the analysis, there were no significant differences between female and male learners' writing achievements and their emotional managements, both female and male learners with low, mid and high emotional understanding and management advanced their writing performances in writing instruction course to the same level.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence(EI), Writing skill, EFL students

1. Introduction

Learners vary enormously in learning a second language. Everybody agrees that some individuals have difficulty in learning a second language but some don't. Among so many factors donating to second language learning success, including motivation, attitude and so on, it is supposed that the most important factor which accounts for success in learning a language is the degree of intelligence that individuals own.

There have been new insights in the research of human intelligence and learning, and the overall concept of intelligence has been expanded. There is a large amount of interest in finding whether individual difference measures such as intelligence act as the predictors of learner academic success or not.

Emotions are created as a result of interaction between thought, physiological changes and behavioral actions and attitudes in response to an external event. Emotional intelligence has a great influence on individuals' ability to managethemselves and leads their actions in a way that they work for them efficiently, such as lowering their voice or controlling their anger when the voice is getting louder.

Gardner's theory (1993) proposes various and independent intelligence capacities that cause many different ways of understanding, recognizing, and learning about the world to have a better knowledge of it. There is a successive flow of new data on how the human brain acts, how it has different characteristics in function between genders, how emotions effect on intellectual acuity, even on how genetics and environment each affect our students' cognitive abilities.

Previous research demonstrated that emotional intelligence is connected with success in many domains, including effective teaching (Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2010), student learning (Brackett & Mayer, 2003), and academic performance (Gil-Olarte, Palomera, & Brackett, 2006). Regarding the role of emotions a number of recently done studies worth being mentioned here. Karimi (2011) indicated that understanding and managing one's own emotions, knowing, being aware of and responsive to others' emotions would contribute to the L2 productive skills, particularly writing, as well as motivation and self-actualization of both university professors of L2 writing and their students.

In another empirical research, Shakiba and Barani (2011) showed that there is a credible and meaningful relationship between language proficiency and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, the relationship between students' Emotional quotient (EQ) level and their level of language proficiency is more powerful and stronger in females than males.

Having a glance at learners' EI and its role in generating and shaping their attitudes and beliefs reveals that EI has not received enough attention in the field of EFL teaching. It is vital that some research be accomplished in the EFL context to examine if and how EQ and language skills are related as it can be a determining factor in the language learners' success. To get this, the present study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' EI and their L2 writing improvement and structural ability. It also sought to determine how much EFL learners' EI contributed to the prediction of their success in L2

writing and grammar skills.

2. Literature Review

Intelligence has been an essential and controversial topic throughout the history of psychology. In addition to questions of exactly how to define intelligence and its types, the debate continues today about whether it can be accurately measured and evaluated. The concept of intelligent was first identified by Spearman (1904) as Dickens (2007) stated:

Spearman (1904) first explained the observation that individuals who perform well on one type of mental ability also tend to do well on many others. For example, people who are good at identifying patterns in chains of abstract drawings are also good at quickly sequencing and arranging pictures in order to tell a story, telling what three dimensional shapes drawn in two dimensions will resemble when rotated, tend to have large vocabularies and are quick at arithmetic. This pattern of moderate to strong positive mutual relations across the whole spectrum of mental abilities led Spearman to hypothesize the existence of a general mental ability similar to the usual notion of intelligence (p. 1).

The term emotional intelligence first was used in the 1960s literary criticism (Van Ghent, 1961) and psychiatry (Leuner, 1966). Two decades later, it was employed more greatly in a lecture (Payne, 1985). Emotional Intelligence is defined as the ability to feel and sense emotions accurately, to manage emotions in the self and others, to utilize emotions to enhance thinking, and to recognize and label emotions. (Mayer & Salovey, 1990).

Models and definitions of emotional intelligence conceptualized it as a mixed set of perceived capabilities, properties, skills, and personality characteristics. Then, for Goleman (1998), a pioneer in the field, EI 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 relationship" (p. 317). "Emotional intelligence consists of knowing what you are feeling, recognizing what others are feeling, managing the feelings in relationships, and using your feelings to motivate yourself--even in the face of frustrations" (Goleman, 1995, p. 43).

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to manage and control one's own and others' emotions and to employ the information to lead thinking and acting. It is the potential to understand and comprehend the feelings of others and create interpersonal relationships. In fact, our sense of social duty composes of interpersonal skills. In the same year they defined EQ as a scientifically testable intelligence. Their definition of EQ has led to the idea that EI is the ability to feel emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to help thought, to recognize emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively control emotions so as to advance emotional and intellectual growth. In other words, as this definition entails, there seem to be four functions in EQ: using emotions to assist thought, understanding emotions, perceiving or sense emotions, and managing emotions.

Goleman suggested a mixed model in terms of performance, integrating an individual's abilities and personality and applying their parallel effects on performance in the workplace (Goleman, 2001). Goleman's model outlined four main emotional intelligence types. The first,

self-awareness, is the ability to read one's emotions and recognize their impact while using gut feelings, deep internal senses, to guide decisions. Self-management, the second construct, involves regulating one's emotions and impulses and conforming to changing circumstances. The third type, social awareness, includes the ability to percept, sense, comprehend, understand, and react to other's emotions while recognizing social networks. Finally, relationship management, which is the fourth construct, involves the ability to inspire, impact, influence, and develop others while coping conflict.

Gardner (1993) argued that IQ test had proportionately little predictive power outside the school context when other social factors were comprised. Gardner initially described seven intelligences which paved the way for exposing other intelligences such as emotional intelligence or what is known as EI or EQ.

Bar-On (1997) proposed that there is a dire need to measure, operationalize, commence, and quantify this construct, since EI is an important element in one's life showing and predicting success. In fact, finding a way to measure and enhance EI seems to be unavoidable. In the year 1997, Bar-On, using his psychological experiences, made his EQ questionnaire which is a suitable test to measure EI.

Goleman (1998) presented a theoretical framework of emotional intelligence that reflected how an individual's capability for mastering the skill of individual competencies (self-awareness, self-management), and social competencies (social awareness and relationship Management) can be translated into job success. He asserted that no gender differences in EI exist, admitting that while men and women may have different views of strengths and weaknesses in various areas of emotional intelligence, their overall levels of EI are equivalent and corresponding.

Fahim and Pishghadam's (2007) study exhibited a positive relationship between university students' academic achievement and several constituents of emotional intelligence such as intrapersonal, stress control, and general mood competencies. Studies showed that although academic achievement does not relate much with IQ, it is strongly associated with some dimensions of EQ such as stress management, intrapersonal and general mood competencies.

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

Wells (1987) stated that writing encourages the students to question formally one's elucidations of others' utterances as well as of one's own personal experiences and beliefs in order to add to the continuous dialogue in some way that improves the community's understanding of the related area of experience.

Ayer (2005) assumed that good writing declares a clear point, and it is tightly structured, grammatically and syntactically correct, tangible, structured and interesting. Regarding professional writing at MA level, Matoti and Shumba (2011) found that even students at higher levels lack understanding of concepts and terminology related to the discipline such as spelling, grammar, referencing, punctuation, and writing coherently, cohesively and logically. So, students enrolled for the post-graduate studies have a low level of writing efficacy.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were MA students of Abadeh Islamic Azad University majoring in English. The students were fifty 25-35 year-old males and females. There were an unequal number of males and females. The reason why post graduate students were selected was that it was assumed that they enjoyed a good knowledge of writing strategies and had already passed different writing courses including essay writing and advanced writing at BA level. Therefore, they knew the principles of writing paragraphs as well as writing essays. They had previously practiced writing different types of essays and were supposed to learn academic writing at MA level.

3.2 Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study. The first one was a writing pretest and posttest. A writing test which was administered at the beginning of the semester to determine the homogeneity of the students. A posttest for a comparison between pre and posttest of writing scores is done in order to check and survey the students' performance before and after the instruction.

The second instrument was an EI Questionnaire consisting of thirty items which was designed to measure global EI. It was based on a Likert scale, the answers of which ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The internal consistency of the global score was reported to exceed .80.

3.3 Procedures

The study was done during an educational semester, with the administration of two tests of writing, one before and another after the instruction. The participants were assigned a random topic (unrelated to the EI items) to write an essay on in 60 minutes. The reason why they were given a pretest was to ensure the homogeneity of the participants and to keep the data for further comparison with the posttest. Then, the EI questionnaire which determines students' level of emotional intelligence was distributed to the students to fill in. They were given time to go over the questionnaire items and answer them.

Then the instruction took about four months during which the students were taught how to write academically, and then a posttest of writing was given to see how much improvement occurred through the comparison of pre- and post-test scores. During the instruction students not only learned the ways of writing scientific issues such as book review, thesis, journal article and so on, but also practiced writing three- and five-paragraph essay writings. It

should be notified that topics of pre and posttests were not the same. The students' scores in the pre- and posttest of writing along with their ratings in the EI questionnaire were considered as the data for the present study. This way, the relationship between writing performance of the participants and their scores in the EI questionnaire was obtained.

4. Results and Discussion

Writing is considered one of the demanding skills by university students, which needs much effort and practice. Furthermore, emotional intelligence aids learners meet challenging tasks and develop their emotional skills. The study investigated whether writing improvement of university students could be related to their emotional skills. In other words, the null hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between learners' writing achievement and their emotional intelligence beliefs.

To answer the first null hypothesis of the study, the differences between writing pre- and post-tests were analyzed so as to check whether students' writing had developed. First students' performances in pre- and post-test were calculated and analyzed. As Table 4.1 illustrates, the mean and standard deviation before ($M=11.95$, $SD=4.17$) and after ($M=15.81$, $SD=4.61$) instruction are considerably different.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Students' Writing Pre- and Post-Tests

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
PreTest	44	11.9545	4.17052
PostTest	44	15.8182	4.61178
Valid N (listwise)	44		

In this regard, paired sample *t*-test was applied to check any possible and significant differences in learners' writing before and after they were instructed. As it is shown in Table 2, learners' writing were significantly enhanced after instruction ($p=0.00$). It indicates that teaching learners how to handle topics works for them and lead to better performances ($t=-16.38$).

Table 2. Paired Sample T-Test Before and After Writing Instruction

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PreTest	-3.86	1.56	.235	-4.33	-3.38	-16.38	43	.000
	Post Test								

Based on the findings of Table 2, the association between learners' writing improvement and the beliefs in their emotional skills was obtained. To check the correlation, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was run.

Table 3. Pearson Moment-Product Correlation Coefficient between Learners' Writing Improvement and Their Emotional Intelligence

		<i>Gain Score</i>	<i>Emotional Intelligence</i>
Gain Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.315*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.038
	N	44	44
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	.315*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	
	N	44	44

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 reveals that instructing learners in their writing skill is considerably related to their emotional intelligence ($p=0.03$). The findings, furthermore, showed that the connection is straight. That is, with teaching learners how to write, argue and defend points, students become motivated to use information contained in emotion to make effective decisions. By the same token, believing that they are capable to manage emotions and handle relationship, learners show more persistence in their writing. Accordingly, based on the results of Tables 2 and 3, the first null hypothesis of the study which stated that there is no correlation between learners' writing achievements and their emotional intelligence was refuted.

The second null hypothesis stated that there is not any significant difference between males and females' writing development at different levels of EI. Learners' writing scores were classified based on their gender, and their responses to emotional intelligence questionnaire were divided to three groups of low, mid and high. The descriptive statistics of students' responses to emotional intelligence questionnaire was reported below. According to the analysis, the mean and standard deviation of students' understanding of their emotion is as follow $M=142.02$ and $SD=14.80$. To test the hypothesis, with considering students' mean scores and minimum (104) and maximum (179) scores in emotional intelligence questionnaire (see Table 4), the students were divided into three levels. Following that, classifying students in three groups, 129, 130 and 155 were calculated as the cut points. Based on the mean scores, out of 44 students, seventeen students went to the low emotional intelligence group ($129 \leq M \leq 104$) (Group 3), twenty-five students entered mid emotional intelligence group ($130 \leq M \leq 154$) (Group 2), and two students were assigned as high emotional intelligence group ($155 \leq M \leq 179$) (Group 1).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence Scale

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Emotional Intelligence	44	104.00	179.00	142.02	14.80
Valid N (listwise)	44				

As well, twenty seven of students were female learners while seventeen ones were males. In order to analyze the data, a two-way ANOVA was utilized. Regarding the ANOVA table, the fifth level is the main row for indicating differences between learners' gender, emotional

intelligent group and their improvement over instruction. Based on the analysis, there were no significant differences between female and male learners' writing achievements and their emotional managements ($M^2=0.42$, $F=0.176$, $p=0.67$). This significant level is higher than the accepted level of significance ($p=0.67 < 0.05$). It notifies that both female and male learners with low, mid and high emotional understanding and management advanced their writing performances in writing instruction course to the same level. The fourth row of the ANOVA table indicates the differences between female and male learners in their writing improvement. The findings revealed that there are no significant differences between learners' gender and their development in writing skill ($M^2=1.69$, $F=0.70$, $p=0.40$). That is to say, male and female learners have developed their writing skill and performed similarly. Likewise, learners at different levels of emotional skill, the third row, reported insignificant differences in their writing improvement ($M^2=4.73$, $F=1.96$, $p=0.15$). Learners with lower, middle and high level of emotional perception and controlling reap the same benefit in the writing instruction course.

Table 5. Tow-Way ANOVA of Females and Males' Writing Performances with Regard to Their Emotional Intelligence Level

Dependent Variable: Gain Score					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	11.057 ^a	4	2.764	1.145	.350
Intercept	325.959	1	325.959	135.059	.000
EI Group	9.471	2	4.735	1.962	.154
Gender	1.695	1	1.695	.702	.407
EI Group * Gender	.424	1	.424	.176	.678
Error	94.125	39	2.413		
Total	762.000	44			
Corrected Total	105.182	43			
a. R Squared = .105 (Adjusted R Squared = .013)					

Accordingly, based on the results of the ANOVA test, the second null hypothesis of the study was accepted ($p=0.67$), and it is proved that female and male learners perform identically in writing tasks concerning their ability in expressing feelings, adapting problems and generating positive affect ($M^2=0.42$, $F=0.17$).

5. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to investigate the possible bond between emotional intelligence and writing improvements of EFL university students. The results showed that there were significant differences between learners' wiring improvement and their understanding of their feelings ($p=0.00$), i.e. with the improvement of their writing, their control and management of their emotion increased. This leads to their better performances in their writing tasks. So, EI

had a significant relationship with writing improvement; that is, the higher the EI, the better the students' writing.

Following that, data were analyzed in order to examine the differences between female and male learners in different emotional intelligence levels concerning their writing improvements. The results of two-way ANOVA revealed that there were no statistical differences between learners' gender, their group of emotional intelligence and their writing improvements.

The results of this study can make the researchers, managers, material designers, and teachers aware of how emotional intelligence could influence writing improvement, which proves the potentiality of the students. This encourages them to take into a more careful consideration the necessity of using a variety of ways in teaching. Teachers are expected more likely to care about the strength and weakness of students' feelings when teaching.

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