

The Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence in the Relationship between Perceived Academic Control and English Achievement among Chinese Ethnic Minority College Students: A Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

This research explores how emotional intelligence moderates the perceived academic control /English achievement relationship among ethnic minority undergraduates in Yunnan, China. These students face additional challenges in multilingual educational contexts, culturally and linguistically. This research explores how PAC affects their English proficiency. Furthermore, it investigates how EI moderates the strength of this relationship. A quantitative methodology and instruments of the Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale and the Perceived Academic Control Scale will be used with simple random sampling. This study seeks to provide insights into the interactions of PAC, EI, and English achievement, ultimately providing strategies to facilitate academic success in this unique context. The results are expected to underscore the importance of EI in supporting students' English learning outcomes, especially in the context

of multilingualism and cultural diversity.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, English achievement, Perceived academic control, Moderating role

1. Introduction

In the current globalised world, it is increasingly essential for education to provide language learners with a worldwide viewpoint (Joannes & AlSaqqaf, 2023). However, Chinese students' English learning falls short of expectations, especially for ethnic minority students, who face greater challenges in learning English due to language transfer from both their mother tongues and Chinese, making it more difficult than for Han Chinese students. Research shows they lag in English proficiency (Yang & Wu, 2009; Liu, 2020). Learning a foreign language involves significant emotional engagement (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Mierzwa-Kamińska, 2021), while Chinese learners' emotional experiences in classrooms differ significantly from those in other regions (Li & AlSaqqaf, 2024; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019).

Moreover, perceived academic control (PAC), which refers to students' beliefs about their influence over their academic success, is considered a great predictor of English achievement (Perry, 2003; Perry et al., 2005a; Shao, 2020). However, it was found to be not high among Chinese school students (Zhao, 2015; Ju, 2012). PAC also got more attention for its impact on student outcomes. However, the relationship between PAC and academic proficiency is complex and multi-dimensional, often shaped by various factors and contextual influences. One key factor that has garnered increasing attention is its impact on academic outcomes.

2. Literature Review

This literature explores essential factors influencing ethnic minority college students' success in multilingual and multicultural contexts. The focus is on PAC and the role of EI as a moderator.

2.1 *Perceived Academic Control*

PAC originated from Control-Value Theory (CVT), which claims that control and value evaluations are immediate precursors to the emotions felt by students in achievement contexts (Pekrun, 2006). CVT highlights the crucial role of emotions throughout the learning experience, precisely the control and value appraisals. Perceived control refers to an individual's overall confidence in their power to influence and predict various environmental aspects (Perry, 1991). Perceived control has been found to be an important factor in college students' academic success (Perry, 2003; Perry et al., 2005a). PAC refers to students' beliefs about their influence over academic success (Perry, 2003). It mainly covers four dimensions: goals, attributions, traits, and experiences (Perry, 1990).

Perry et al. (2001) discovered that students with a stronger sense of control performed better across cognitive, emotional, and motivational factors and their overall course achievements. These students exhibited higher effort and reported less boredom and anxiety than those with lower perceived control (Stupnisky et al., 2008) identified that PC positively impacted college students' critical thinking abilities and GPA. Ruthig et al. (2009) found that PC played a vital role in maintaining the benefits of optimism and support throughout the school year, ultimately reducing the likelihood of depression. The positive association between PAC and GPA increased over time (Respondek et al., 2020). Shao et al. (2020) show that control is

related positively to positive emotions (e.g., enjoyment) and FL performance; control interacts with predicting FL performance. The learners' beliefs about their control over language learning outcomes may influence their motivation, effort, and success in language learning.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence

EI involves the capacity to recognise, comprehend, manage, and apply emotions to foster personal and cognitive development (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). It plays a key role in adaptive behaviours (Zeidner et al., 2012). The ability approach views EI as a form of intelligence, linking emotional processing to cognition and general intelligence. Therefore, EI should be evaluated by tasks that require solving problems (Mayer et al., 2016; Fiori & Maillefer, 2018).

The regulation of students' emotions is essential (Oz et al., 2015). Research gradually emphasises the emotional factors in foreign language learning (Arnold, 2011; Yu et al., 2022), strengthening studies on emotions in foreign language learning (Boudreau et al., 2018; Dewaele & Li, 2020). Positive emotions can enhance learners' engagement and persistence (Pekrun et al., 2002; Zhang et al., 2020), while negative emotions may impede language proficiency (Zhang et al., 2020). Thus, efficiently managing and using negative emotions is essential for academic success. Furthermore, studies show a moderate correlation between EI and academic performance (MacCann et al., 2020; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2020). Foreign language learning is greatly connected to emotions and interpersonal communication (MacIntyre et al., 2019). Scovel (2000) emphasised that while emotions significantly influence language learning, they remain among the least explored aspects of second language acquisition. Furthermore, studies suggest that Chinese foreign language learners' emotional processes in the classroom notably differ from other learners in other areas (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). So, it is important to conduct research on EI as an antecedent as well as a moderator and EI/English achievement relationships in a multilingual Chinese context.

2.3 Multilingualism

Research shows that learners who are proficient in several languages are likely to develop greater grammatical metalinguistic awareness (Kemp, 2001) and achieve greater success in mastering languages. Kemp (2007) discovered that participants who know at least two languages use more grammatical learning methods. Dewaele et al. (2008) claimed that multilingual learners reported less communication anxiety and foreign language anxiety. Multilingual individuals take advantage of broadened language skills and richer language learning experience, helping them learn more languages (Cenoz, 2013). Additionally, those who are more linguistically diverse and skilled in foreign languages are likely to experience higher levels of foreign language enjoyment (Botes et al., 2020). However, very few studies were conducted to see multilingualism as an important predictive variable in emotions in FL learning (Botes et al., 2020).

In summary, the literature shows that while studies have investigated individual variables of EI and PAC, their connections have yet to be examined, and further studies are badly needed.

This research explores EI as a moderator in the PAC/ English proficiency relationship in the Chinese multilingual context. The research seeks a more profound understanding of the complex interaction influencing the language learning in this context.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

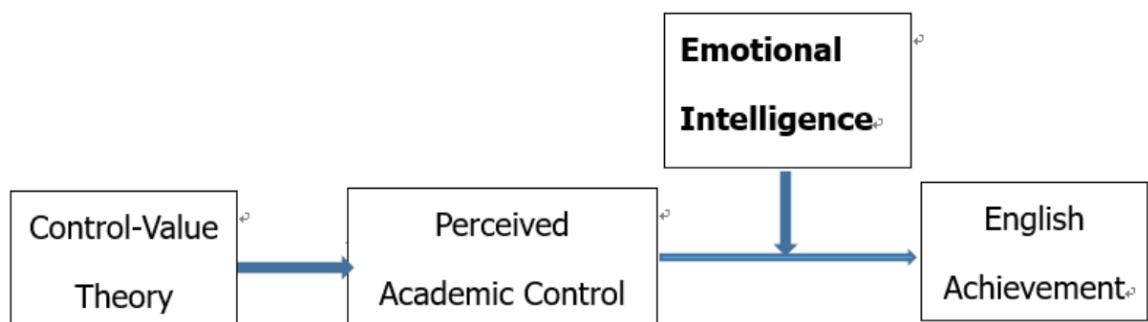


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

PAC originated from control-value theory (CVT), which advocates that control and value appraisals are determinants of emotions learners feel in learning settings (Pekrun, 2006). The control-value theory examines achievement emotions, which are closely related to academic tasks and outcomes. It offers a comprehensive framework for emotional analysis, its conceptual foundations, causes, effects, and correlations within a specific academic context (Pekrun et al., 2007). Furthermore, the CVT proposes a model where determinants, achievement emotions, and scholastic success are interconnected through a two-way causal link (Pekrun et al., 2007). This study proposes that student success in English learning, specifically English achievement, is influenced by two main factors: firstly, PAC, which suggests that students' beliefs about control over their learning are crucial for motivation and achievement. Students with high PAC feel confident in setting and achieving English language goals. They believe their effort and strategies will significantly influence their learning outcomes.

Secondly, high EI can help students face the challenges of English learning, such as pressure with mistakes or anxiety during communication. It can also support positive learning experiences by promoting motivation, self-regulation, and social interaction. While the control-value theory focuses on perceived control, EI moderates the relationship between PAC and English achievement. High EI might amplify the positive effects of perceived control. Conversely, low EI might dampen the positive effects of perceived control.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

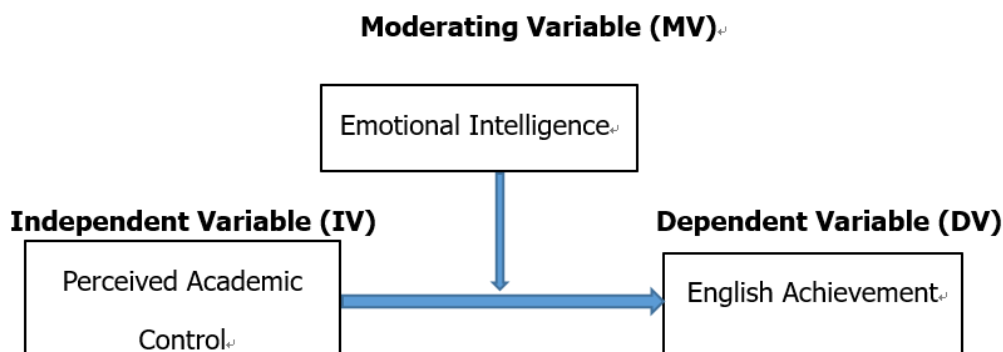


Figure 2. Conceptual framework

2.5.1 Direct Relationship Between PAC and English Achievement

Students with increased PAC correspond with improved English achievement, indicating a positive relationship between the two factors. It suggests that when students believe they have greater control over their academic performance in the English language, they tend to achieve greater success in English-related tasks, assessments, and coursework.

2.5.2 Emotional Intelligence Moderates PAC/English Achievement Relationship

EI is a moderator in the PAC-English proficiency. This means that EI plays a role in influencing the strength or nature of the connection between a student's PAC and their English achievement. It suggests that EI can either enhance or diminish the impact of PAC on a student's English achievement. This moderation effect highlights the importance of considering EI as a factor that can shape the relationship between PPAC and academic outcomes in English. For example, if a student has a high level of PAC but also possesses a high level of EI, their EI might enhance the positive impact of PAC on English Achievement. This student may be better at managing stress, building positive relationships with teachers and peers, and effectively using their perceived control to excel in English studies. As MacCann et al. (2020) advocate, one of the mechanisms underlying the EI-academic performance link is that it regulates academic emotions. Specifically, EI enhances academic performance by regulating emotions related to learning. This emotional regulation creates a supportive learning environment and improves cognitive functions like memory and problem-solving, leading to better academic outcomes.

2.6 Research Questions

- 1) What are the levels of EI, PAC, and EA among ethnic minority undergraduates?
- 2) Does PAC influence English achievement?
- 3) Does EI moderate the relationship between PAC and English achievement?

3. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative method to collect and analyse data. The EI questionnaire and PAC questionnaire will be carried out on ethnic minority undergraduates in a multilingual context to investigate the level of EI, PAC and English proficiency. Simple random sampling will be used among about 465 respondents, all aged between 18 and 21. These improvements and eliminations were intended to more effectively meet the research objectives (Hu & AlSaqqaf, 2023).

3.1 Research Instruments

The EI and PAC questionnaires will be used to answer the three research questions. This EI questionnaire (total of 33 items) originated from the Self-Report Scale of Schutte et al. (1998), with constructs of appraisal and expression of Emotion (AOE), use of emotions (UOE) and regulation of emotion (ROE)

The PAC questionnaire (8 items) in this research will be adapted from the modified version of Perry et al. (2001) to evaluate students' sense of control in their second language (L2) and measure how students perceive their capacity to impact their academic performance. English achievement in this study is the standardised exam Band 4 for the National College English Test (CET4) for non-English majors.

4. Discussion

This proposed study investigates the potential role of EI as a moderator in the PAC-English proficiency relationships across ethnic minority undergraduates with multilingual backgrounds. This research is particularly significant because of the unique linguistic and cultural contexts of ethnic minority college students in China, whose multilingual backgrounds may influence their English achievement. By exploring the moderating role of EI, this research seeks to deepen the understanding of English learning in this multilingual context. The research results have implications for educational practice and policy.

The potential moderating role of EI equips students with the ability to manage and use emotions when perceiving their control over their English learning outcomes, potentially amplifying the positive effects of perceived control. Students with high control and EI may be better able to set ambitious goals, face language learning challenges bravely, and regulate their emotions to utilise learning strategies effectively. However, low EI could impede the positive effects of perceived control. Even if students are confident about their control ability, poor emotional management could impede this capability to learn effectively, ultimately impacting English achievement. By exploring this moderating effect, the present study can contribute to a profound understanding of factors influencing ELL success among Chinese ethnic minority students.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the current study has outlined a theoretical proposal to explore the moderating effect of EI on PAC/English achievement among minority undergraduates in China. It is proposed that EI is a critical moderator in the interplay between PAC and English

achievement. Individuals' ability to recognise, understand, and manage emotions can significantly influence their sense of control over their English learning outcomes. Individuals with high EI are better able to handle challenges, setbacks, and anxiety effectively, enhancing their general English achievement. In contrast, ethnic minority college students with lower EI may encounter difficulties when they are regulating and using their PAC, which will hinder their language learning progress. This study may benefit educators, policymakers, and English teachers about the importance of EI in shaping the PAC/academic achievement relationship, suggesting the need for necessary interventions to improve students' EI ability. Furthermore, this study potentially contributes to the theoretical insight of academic achievement by exploring the role of EI as a moderator in PAC and academic outcomes.

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