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Association between Emotional Intelligence and Meta-Cognitive Reading Strategies among Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract

In this study, an attempt was made to measure the relationship between emotional intelligence and metacognitive reading strategies among intermediate-level English students. Initially, 82 language learners from Payame Noor University were selected based on simple random sampling. The researcher explained the purpose of the test and asked them to answer the questionnaire correctly. The OPT level test was performed for them and the results were used to select a homogeneous group of participants whose scores were between a standard deviation lower and higher than the average. Two questionnaires on emotional intelligence and metacognitive reading strategies were used to collect the required data. The result of the rank-spearman correlation showed that there is a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and metacognitive reading strategies. The study provides implications for the ELT community.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Meta-cognitive Reading Strategies; EFL Learners

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a complex and essential skill for academic success, especially for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) who face various linguistic and cultural challenges. To overcome these challenges, EFL learners need to employ effective reading strategies that can help them monitor and regulate their own reading process and

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outcomes. Metacognitive reading strategies are one type of reading strategies that involve planning, monitoring, evaluating, and regulating one's own reading behavior and comprehension (Azmuddin et al., 2017).

However, reading comprehension is not only influenced by cognitive factors but also by emotional factors. Emotional intelligence has been found to affect various aspects of learning, such as motivation, self-regulation, academic achievement, and well-being (e.g., Brackett et al., 2011; Pishghadam, 2009). Moreover, emotional intelligence has been linked to the use of metacognitive strategies in general (e.g., Goleman, 1995; Mayer et al., 2004).

The significance of emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to identify, assess, and control one's own and others' emotions (Goleman, 1998), has gained prominence in educational settings worldwide. Concurrently, meta-cognitive reading strategies, which involve thinking about one's cognitive processes and employing strategies to enhance comprehension (Flavell, 1979; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), have been recognized as pivotal in second language reading acquisition.

2. Literature Review

Emotional intelligence (EI), commonly referred to as Emotional Quotient (EQ), has garnered significant attention worldwide since 1995. Goleman (1998) defines emotional intelligence as "a skill or ability in the case of the trait EI model, a self-perceived ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself, of others, and of groups" (p. 125). The application of emotional intelligence has expanded notably, particularly within educational, personal, work, and business contexts, as evidenced by research studies (Bar-On, 2001). Martinez (1997) elucidates emotional intelligence as the capacity to accurately reason about one's own and others' emotions, facilitating enriched thinking and decision-making. Goleman (1998) further posits emotional intelligence as "the capacity for recognizing our feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships" (p. 317), delineating its four major components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

The definition offered by Bar-On (1997) encompasses a comprehensive array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills crucial for success in coping with environmental demands and pressures. This broad perspective underscores emotional intelligence's relevance to various facets of intelligence, encompassing emotional, social, personal, and survival aspects (Bar-On, 2007). Central to these

definitions is the individual's reliance on their ability to manage emotions, both their own and those of others, to attain success in any endeavor, with Bar-On's (1997) definition particularly suited to learners within educational contexts.

Flavell (1979) introduced the term "meta-cognition" defining it as one's knowledge concerning cognitive processes and products. Meta-cognition involves thinking about thinking (Flavell, 1979) and encompasses various strategies such as planning, monitoring comprehension or production, and self-evaluation (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) categorize metacognitive reading strategies into global, problem-solving, and support strategies, highlighting their crucial role in managing and monitoring reading comprehension.

Reading is a multifaceted process, as noted by some researchers who see it as having some higher and lower-level components and some think that it is more of a constructing meaning that results in comprehension (Grabe, 2014; Koda, 2007). Constructing meaning in text entails more complex mental processing for the reader because the learner needs to remember the steps such as main ideas, supporting ideas, and conclusion to recall this information. This is where the meta-cognitive nature of reading processing comes into play.

Goodman (1967) suggested that reading is a meaning-making process since it is acquired through communication because the reader is expected to remember the main ideas and many supporting ideas and can recall this information as needed. Grabe (2009) suggests that higher-level reading skills require more conscious self-examination on the part of the reader.

In other words, comprehension of difficult texts can only be processed through meta-cognition. It is also critical to mention the mental analysis of reading a text. Koda (2005) mentions the importance of meta-cognitive awareness; first, for reading acquisition to occur, the child must understand that graphic symbols correspond to speech units; what each symbol represents; and how they can be combined to form a word. Lacking these basic insights, written symbols are perceived as non-sense scribbles, and their learning is unduly painstaking because it is apparently both useless and meaningless. (p. 314)

Moreover, understanding the nature of the text and making a comprehensive analysis requires meta-cognitive approaches that increase the likelihood of decoding words to find identified elements in some unidentified chains of letters. Without meta-cognitive abilities, the

reader's capacity will be limited and will not comprehend the text. As a final point, it is widely accepted that reading strategies in one language transfer to another language. It is not clear which particular reading skills transfer or how much they affect the second language development or to what extent. Since transferring reading skills from L1 to L2 is meta-cognitive, those who have meta-linguistic capabilities are more successful in reading (Koda, 2007).

3. Concerns of the study

In recent years, the emotional components of second language (L2) learning have emerged as a significant concern for instructors, prompting numerous studies to explore the impact of emotions on foreign language acquisition (Soodmand Afshar & Rahimi, 2016). Despite this, English Language Teaching (ELT) studies have historically prioritized cognition and thought over emotions (Swain, 2013), though Méndez (2011) and Swain (2013) argue for the inseparability of emotional and cognitive processes in L2 acquisition.

Over the past three decades, research on second language reading has increasingly emphasized reading strategies due to their role in revealing learners' cognitive processes and facilitating the achievement of cognitive goals (Anderson, 2008). Anderson (2005) asserts that second-language learners with strong metacognitive skills can enhance their learning, underscoring the importance of metacognitive awareness in second-language reading.

Despite the recognized importance of meta-cognitive reading strategies, research on their relationship with emotional intelligence remains limited, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. However, acknowledging the significance of both emotional intelligence and meta-cognitive reading strategies in EFL learning, this study aims to explore their association among Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

Particularly within the Iranian EFL learning context, reading proficiency holds considerable importance, as it is a prime objective of the EFL curriculum. Thus, this study seeks to address this gap by investigating the relationship between learners' emotional intelligence and their utilization of meta-cognitive reading strategies. By exploring this relationship, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of factors influencing reading proficiency among EFL learners.

In summary, the significance of emotional intelligence and meta-cognitive reading strategies in EFL learning underscores the importance of investigating their relationship. Through this exploration, this study

aims to shed light on potential avenues for enhancing reading proficiency among EFL learners, thereby contributing to the broader understanding of language learning processes.

4. Objectives

The field of applied linguistics has witnessed a growing interest in the role of emotional intelligence and foreign language learning in second and foreign language acquisition (Petrides, 2009). This has led to an increase in research on the connection between emotional intelligence and metacognitive reading strategies, which are cognitive processes that help readers monitor and regulate their comprehension (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002; Zhang, 2001). The present study aimed to investigate the interaction between emotional intelligence and metacognitive reading strategies among intermediate learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). The study also sought to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and metacognitive reading strategies concerning reading comprehension performance.

Accordingly, this study explored the following research question:

RQ: How does emotional intelligence relate to meta-cognitive reading strategies among Iranian intermediate EFL learners?

To test the research question, the study proposes the following null hypothesis:

H0: Emotional intelligence and meta-cognitive reading strategies are not correlated among Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

5. Significance of the study

EFL educators have a responsibility to foster the emotional and cognitive development of learners, as there is evidence of a link between high emotional intelligence and EFL reading comprehension (Motallebzadeh, 2009; Zhang, 2001). The enhancement of cognitive and metacognitive strategies depends on how they are cultivated in the educational system and how teachers address the students' reading comprehension needs. Based on the findings of this study, teachers can improve their student's learning potential by increasing their level of emotional intelligence. This would enable students to learn more, perform better in reading comprehension tasks, and overcome the gaps in their learning process. Emotional intelligence is a key factor for achieving optimal language learning outcomes, along with cognitive intelligence. Therefore, students' emotional intelligence aspects should not be ignored or overlooked. It is vital for language teachers to pay attention to the emotional aspects of the students and to integrate

emotional factors into their reading instruction. Hence, English language teachers should be aware of the significance of the concept of emotional intelligence and strive to improve their skills to teach reading-related cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Froiland and Davison, 2020; Petrides, 2009). Reading comprehension can be challenging and intimidating for many learners. Thus, the teachers have to create a supportive and comfortable environment for students to enhance their emotional skills. Emotional intelligence skills help learners to cope with stress and conflict situations when they encounter difficulties in reading comprehension. The literature in this area suggests that the more emotionally healthy learners are, the more effectively they learn (Castilho et al., 2017; Vassiou et al., 2016). Consequently, English teachers are expected to use an educational curriculum that fosters and strengthens their learners' emotional intelligence, so that they become aware of metacognitive strategies of reading and their impact on learning, and develop relevant skills in the language classes.

6. Methodology

6.1. Participants

The study aimed to select a homogeneous sample of 70 EFL learners from a population of 82 learners who took an OPT test. The researcher used the test results to filter out the participants whose scores were within one standard deviation of the mean. The sample consisted of both male and female learners, aged between 20 and 45. The researcher employed a simple random sampling technique to ensure that each individual in the population had an equal and independent probability of being included in the sample.

6.2. Instruments

6.2.1. Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire

The researcher used Bar-On EQ-i test to measure the participants' emotional intelligence. This test is a self-report measure of social and emotional intelligence that Bar-On (1997) developed. It consists of 133 items, but Bar-On later revised it to 117 items. Samouei (2003) further adapted the test for the Iranian culture by removing 27 items that were unclear or irrelevant. The researchers applied this 90-item version of the test in the current study. Samouei (2003), as quoted by Vaezi and Fallah (2012), reported that the test had adequate internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity. She found a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93 and an odd-even, split-half reliability index of 0.88. The researchers computed a Cronbach alpha of .84 for the test in this

study. The test used a five-point Likert-scale format from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The researchers also calculated the Cronbach alpha indexes for the test's subscales, which were .91 for intrapersonal skills, .88 for interpersonal skills, .93 for stress management, .87 for adaptability, and .88 for general mood in this study.

6.2.2. Survey of Reading Strategies Questionnaire (SORS)

The researchers used the SORS, a questionnaire developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), to assess the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies among ESL/EFL learners. The SORS was adapted from the MARSI, an instrument created by Mokhtari (2000) to measure the reading strategies of native English speakers. However, the MARSI was not suitable for non-native speakers, as Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) noted (p. 3). Therefore, they designed the SORS, which was more appropriate for ESL/EFL learners. Mokhtari and Richard (2002) validated the SORS with a diverse sample of students and found that it had good psychometric properties, including reliability (Alpha = .93) and validity. The SORS consists of 30 items that use a 5-point Likert Scale from 1 (I never or almost never do this) to 5 (I always or almost always do this) (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002, p. 4). The SORS measures three factors of metacognitive awareness: Global Reading Strategies (GLOB), Problem Solving Strategies (PROB), and Support Reading Strategies (SUP). GLOB includes 13 items that relate to how learners plan and organize their reading (e.g., setting a purpose or selecting what to read or skip). PROB has eight items that reflect how learners deal with difficulties while reading (e.g., reading slowly or paying more attention). SUP has nine items that indicate how learners use external resources to aid their reading comprehension (e.g., translating or paraphrasing) (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002). Jafari and Shokrpour (2012) tested the Persian version of the SORS and reported a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.92, which was acceptable for reliability.

6.2.3. Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

To determine the level of language proficiency of the learners participating in this study, an OPT test has proved to be a highly effective initial placement instrument and a reliable means of grading students at all levels from elementary upwards, with a consistent record of predictive validity regarding examination entry. The test consists of reading, listening, and grammar sections, which take about an hour to complete.

6.3. Procedure

The researcher recruited six classes of students from Sari Payame Noor University to participate in this research. The students were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and gave their written consent. They were also assured that their participation was voluntary and their responses would be kept confidential. The researcher explained the concepts of emotional intelligence and metacognitive strategies and how they would be measured in the study. The researcher also promised to share the results of the emotional intelligence and metacognitive strategies questionnaires with the students based on their assigned numbers. The researcher administered the three instruments in three sessions in three consecutive weeks. First, the OPT was given to the students to determine their English proficiency level. The test consisted of three sections: reading, writing, and listening. The test had a total of 100 questions and took 60 minutes to complete. Second, the SORS questionnaire was distributed to the students to assess their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. The questionnaire had 30 items that used a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (I never or almost never do this) to 5 (I always or almost always do this). The questionnaire measured three factors of metacognitive awareness: global, problem-solving, and support reading strategies. The questionnaire took about 15 minutes to complete. Third, the Baron emotional intelligence questionnaire was handed out to the students to measure their emotional intelligence. The questionnaire had 90 items that used a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire measured five factors of emotional intelligence: intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes to complete. The researcher collected all the instruments after the students finished them and prepared them for statistical analysis.

6.4. Data Analysis

This study tried to find any relationship between emotional intelligence and meta-cognitive strategies among EFL intermediate learners. Data were analyzed by use of the software of SPSS 26. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the data collected and to answer the research question. It would be done by using the Pearson correlation statistical method to investigate the relationship between two quantitative, continuous variables to examine any relationship between the scores of EFL students‟ emotional intelligence and meta-cognitive strategies among EFL learners.

7. Results

7.1. Language Proficiency Test

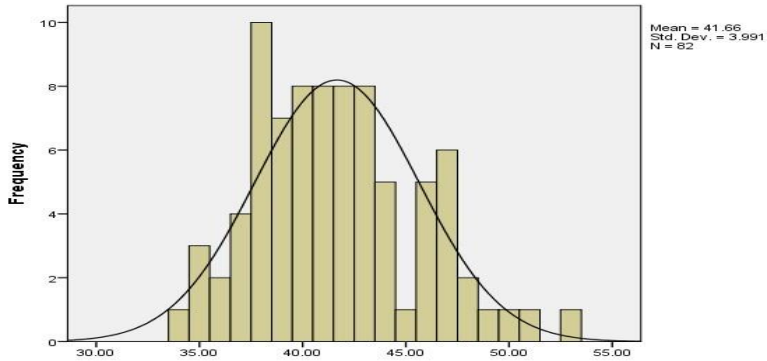
To have homogenized participants in terms of their general English language proficiency, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered. The descriptive statistics for the OPT are displayed in the following table.

Table 1. *The Descriptive Statistics of the Homogenized Participants*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Homogenized	70	37.00	47.00	41.5143	2.98179	8.891
Valid N (listwise)	70					

Table 1 above shows the descriptive statistics of the OPT test. As can be seen in Table 1 above, the mean and the standard deviation of the participants were 41.65 and 3.99 respectively. The following figure shows the histogram with a normal curve for the initial participants.

Figure 1. *OPT Test*



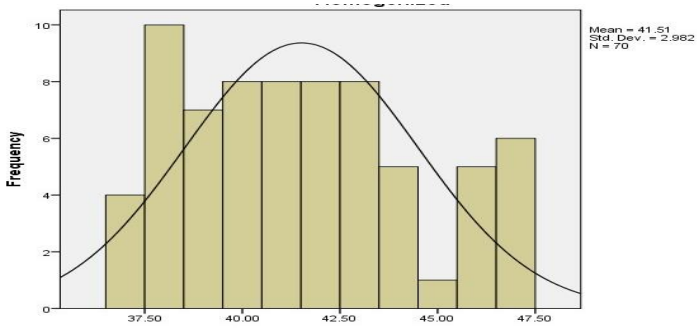
After administering the language proficiency test, out of 82 participants, 70 were considered homogenous members based on their scores of OPT ranging from 37 to 47 (intermediate level). The next table shows the descriptive statistics of the homogenized participants.

Table 2. *The Descriptive Statistics of the Homogenized Participants*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Homogenized	70	37.00	47.00	41.5143	2.98179	8.891
Valid N (listwise)	70					

As can be seen in Table 2 above, the mean and the standard deviation of the homogenized participants were 41.51 and 2.98 respectively. The following figure shows the histogram with a normal curve for the homogenized participants.

Figure 2. *Homogenized participants*



The homogenized participants were given emotional intelligence and metacognitive questionnaires to fill out.

7.2. Research Question

The research question of this study asked whether there was any statistically significant relationship between intelligence and metacognitive reading strategies among Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners. To run an appropriate test for the correlation between two variables, the researcher had to meet one assumption: normality of data distribution. Table 3 below shows the two sets of data lack the required normality.

Table 3. *Test of Normality for Learners' Emotional Intelligence and Metacognitive Strategies*

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	**df**	**Sig.**
Emotional_Int	.888	70	.000
Meta-cog	.962	70	.031

As can be seen in Table 3 above (the result of Shapiro-Wilk), the data were not normally distributed for the two sets of scores ($p < .05$). Therefore, the non-parametric Spearman Rank-Order Correlation was

used to find the relationship. Table 4 below shows the descriptive statistics for the two variables.

Table 4. *The Descriptive Statistics for the Emotional Intelligence and Metacognitive Strategies*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Emotional_Int	70	280.00	359.00	318.3571	26.65998	710.755
Meta-cog	70	26.00	37.00	31.1857	3.06118	9.371
Valid N(listwise)	70					

The means and the standard deviation scores of the Emotional Intelligence and Meta-cognitive were 318.35, 26.65, and 31.18, 3.06 respectively. The result of the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation test for finding the relationship between the emotional intelligence and metacognitive strategies of the participants is presented below.

Table 5. *Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Test*

		Emotional_Int	Meta-cognitive
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient **Emotional_Int**	1.000	.887**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	70	70
	Correlation Coefficient **Meta-Cog**	.887**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	70	70

The Spearman Rank-Order Correlation was run to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and meta-cognitive strategies. As the Table shows, there was an almost high, positive correlation between these two variables, which was also statistically significant (r_s = .887, p < .05). Thus, the researcher safely rejects the null hypothesis meaning that there was a statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and meta-cognitive strategies EFL learners.

8. Discussion

This research revealed a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and metacognitive reading strategies in EFL learners. This result is consistent with previous studies by Salataci and Akyel (2002),

Zhang (2013), Nemat Tabrizi and Esmaeili (2016), and Ateş (2019). This strong correlation between an individual's emotional intelligence and metacognitive strategies could be explained by the fact that the five competencies of emotional intelligence, namely intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, and general mood, were related to the metacognitive strategies used by the EFL learners. These metacognitive strategies consisted of three components: global reading strategies (GLOB), which involved how students planned and monitored their reading; problem-solving strategies (PROB), which dealt with how learners overcame reading difficulties; and support reading strategies (SUP), which included various techniques that assisted readers. The use of metacognitive strategies was crucial for the development of emotional intelligence in learners. If the learners could manage their emotions, they could also direct their cognitive and metacognitive resources to cope with their emotions, control their anger, handle conflicts, empathize with others, and so on. Emotional regulation played a key role in shaping the student's emotional well-being and their use of metacognitive strategies. They could observe and understand their emotions and learn how to apply metacognitive strategies effectively. Other researchers also investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and metacognitive strategies. For instance, Taheri and Jadidi (2019) reported a significant correlation between emotional intelligence, language learning strategies, and learning styles. Perikova and Byzova (2019) found that emotional intelligence was related to both academic performance and metacognitive awareness. These studies also showed positive associations between emotional intelligence and the respective variables. However, few studies examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and language learning success.

9. Conclusions and Implications

This study aimed to explore the association between emotional intelligence and metacognitive awareness in Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The researchers used the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation to examine the relationship between the two variables. The results indicated a high and positive correlation between emotional intelligence and metacognitive awareness, which was statistically significant. Therefore, the study confirmed a significant relationship between the two variables in EFL learners. This study contributed to the evidence of the connection between emotional intelligence and metacognitive awareness.

This study had some implications for language teachers, students, and assessment experts. First, emotional intelligence is not a fixed trait, but a malleable skill that can be developed. Based on this premise, some suggestions can be made for policymakers, language teachers, and materials developers. Bar-On (2007) suggested that educational programs should be based on scientific and empirical findings to enhance students' emotional and social intelligence. Emotional intelligence can help language learners to improve their cognitive and metacognitive awareness and to use language skills more effectively. Second, implementing emotional intelligence in the educational system can lead to a more efficient, productive, and humane society (Bar-On, 2007). Parents and English language teachers should be familiar with the concept of emotional intelligence. They should communicate with children about emotions, respect children, provide children with supportive scaffolding, and help them develop more skills in this area. Teachers have an important role in helping learners to acquire reading skills and cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Third, the study showed that there was a relationship between emotional intelligence and metacognitive awareness in the EFL context. This implies that if emotional intelligence can be enhanced, it may be possible to train those who lack emotional competencies to improve their abilities to identify, express, and regulate their emotions. There should be programs to increase the emotional competencies of those learners, especially those who learn metacognitive awareness. Language teachers are advised to consider the link between emotions and language proficiency in designing courses and programs for EFL students. They should focus on skills related to emotional intelligence so that students can achieve more emotional success and become more proficient in metacognitive awareness of reading strategies.

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